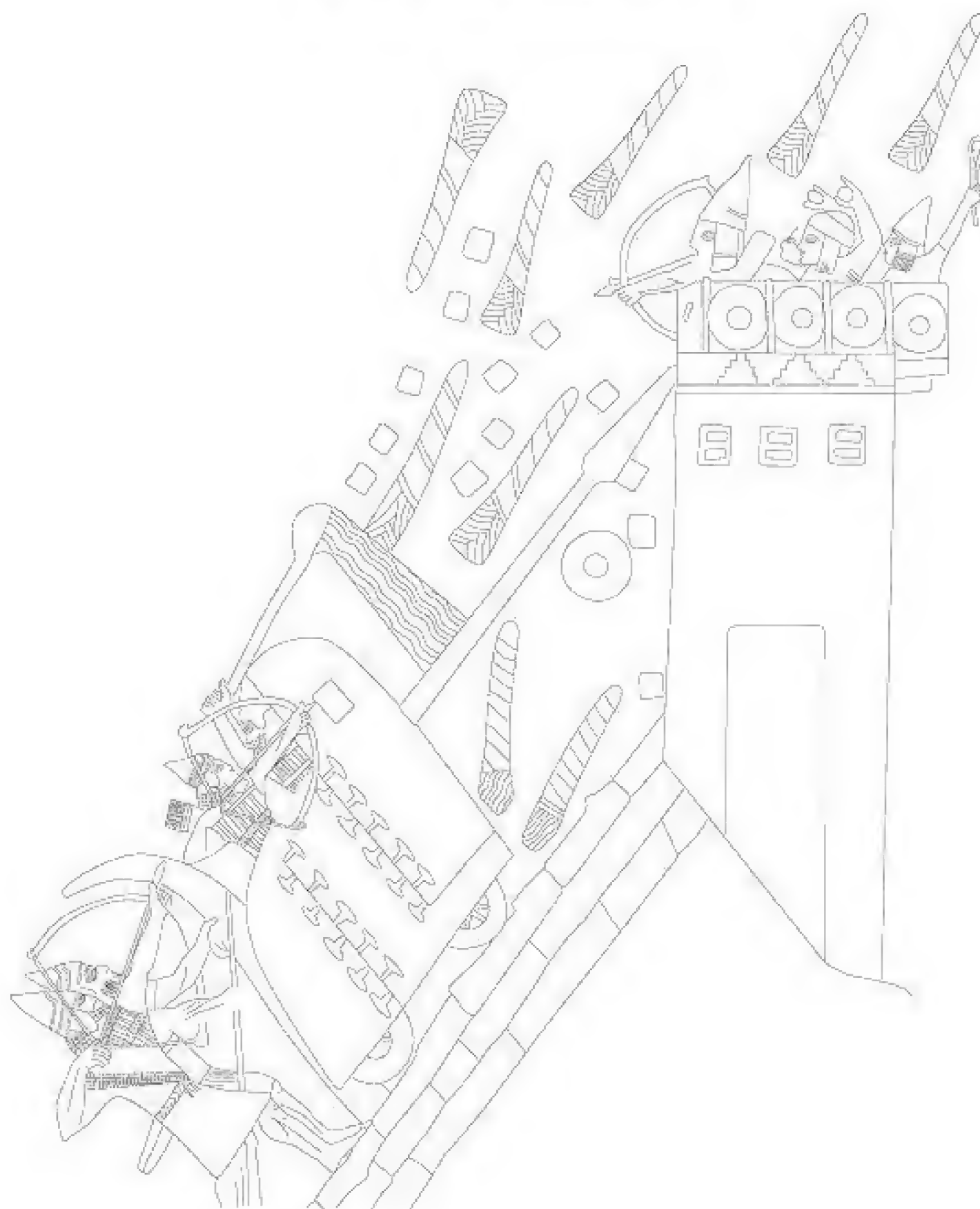


Warfare in the Old Testament



Boyd Seevers

With line drawings by Josh Seevers

Warfare in the Old Testament

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<i>HALOT</i>	Kochler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Herodotus: With an English Translation by A. D. Godley</i> . The Loeb Classical Library. T. E. Page, et al, eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1960
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>MRTO</i>	<i>Military Rank, Title, and Organization in the Egyptian New Kingdom</i> . A. Schulman. Berlin, 1964
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . Edited by E. Stern. 4 vols. Jerusalem, 1993
<i>NEASB</i>	<i>Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RIMA</i>	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
<i>Strabo</i>	<i>The Geography of Strabo: With an English Translation by Horace Leonard Jones</i> . The Loeb Classical Library. T. E. Page, et al, eds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1961
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>

Looking back into history through the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts has caused me to wonder if the ancient Israelites, Egyptians, Assyrians, and others would also have said, “I can’t imagine life without the army.” Accounts of military campaigns and battles abound in their texts. Ancient kings set out, frequently at the command of their god(s), to fight for their freedom or to assert their rightful dominance over a rebellious nation. Scribes often recorded the results of these wars in accounts usually intended to exalt the king and/or the nation’s god(s). Military information even permeates non-military texts. Warfare clearly pervaded much of the ancient Near Eastern world.

The scriptural accounts of ancient Israel fit this pattern well. Joshua, David, and other leaders led armies into battle, often with Yahweh’s blessing. Israel typically fought to do God’s will, and honored him with the result. The Bible, like other contemporary literature from this period, often includes interesting but brief accounts of those wars and battles.

The biblical authors normally write about warfare for some theological purpose, such as illustrating faith—or lack thereof—in God by some Israelite leader or the nation as a whole. Such was the case with Israel’s remarkable victory at Jericho, reportedly won because of Israel’s obedience to Yahweh’s precise instructions (Josh. 5:13–6:27). The same holds true for King Hezekiah, who prayed that God would deliver Judah from the Assyrians so that “all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, alone, LORD, are God” (2 Kings 19:19). Along with illustrating proper faith in God, the biblical authors also include accounts of battles and campaigns to show the fulfillment of prophecy, as David’s conquests in 2 Samuel 8:1–14 fulfilled God’s promise of a great kingdom (Josh. 1:4).

But when battles—even significant battles—did not fit into the author’s theological purpose, they received little or no mention. For example, the major powers of the time fought a great battle at Carchemish on the Euphrates River in northern Syria in 605 BC. This battle changed the balance of power in the entire ancient Near East at that time, but it is only hinted at in 2 Kings 23:28. This brief mention appears to serve more as an explanation of why King Josiah’s religious reform ended (with the king’s death), rather than recording how the battle of Carchemish was changing the face of contemporary political realities.

This brevity and seeming disinterest in military and other non-theological matters often leaves the modern reader of the Bible without a clear picture of how certain biblical events such as battles and military

The next morning, Judah ben-Eliezer awoke before the morning trumpet call. He lay still and thought for a few minutes. He moved his torso carefully to confirm that the effects of the circumcision had passed. Good. Then his mind turned to what lay ahead. The Israelites would begin to engage the Canaanites today, though perhaps they would just attack each other with words from a safe distance, if he was anticipating correctly. Even that seemed like a watershed. For his entire life Judah had looked forward to the chance to conquer Canaan, as had his father and those of his generation. His father's father and countless generations before that had longed for this opportunity but knew that they wouldn't see it. God had promised his people centuries ago that they would return to Canaan and take the land, but always it had been too far away to become reality for them. Today Judah would see that distant promise begin to merge with very real current events, and he knew that blood and death were needed to bring the promises to life. His generation would see the divine promises come true, and many would pay the price in blood. These were great concepts that even Judah's nimble brain struggled to fully comprehend and synthesize.

Soon the blowing of the ram's horn announced the time to rise, and the day began. The men ate a breakfast of unleavened bread, dates, and wine, courtesy of the unwilling locals, and packed roasted grain and dried dates⁸ to carry along with skins of water or wine. They somberly donned their protective gear and weapons, modest though they were. Judah looked around at his close and distant kinsmen preparing for battle. Many wore plain garments with no extra protection beyond simple wooden shields covered with leather that all had fashioned for themselves. Others, like Judah, substituted simple leather garments for their regular clothing. Leather could not stop a direct blow from a spear, sword, or even an arrow, but it did lessen and even deflect entirely some indirect blows. His mother had made leather garments for Judah and his brothers, and Judah thought the extra protection worth the discomfort from the added weight and heat. Plus, it made mother feel like she was helping protect her boys.

The Israelites' offensive weapons also appeared quite modest compared to the spears, swords, axes, and composite bows that Egyptian troops or soldiers of other great armies would carry. Many Israelites had only basic weapons they could fashion themselves—slings or simple bows for long range fighting, and sharpened sticks for spears to use at close range.

Though they had to start with simple weapons, Israelite troops upgraded their weaponry at the expense of enemy citizens or troops whenever

As per divine orders, Joshua led the army not directly toward the city but slightly to the side so they could go around it without engaging. They would circle the city once, close enough to observe as much as they could, but far enough away to stay out of range of enemy archers manning the ramparts on top of the walls. The Israelites couldn't make out archers or any other defenders clearly yet, but everyone knew they were there.

The long line of Israelites continued to advance, and soon they could hear the first of the enemy's taunts between the blasts of the Israelites' rams' horns. No one knew whether the enemies' jeers came more from confidence in their defenses or from fear because of the reputation of the attackers, both of which were substantial. Taunts were a typical part of the game, except that the order had come down that the Israelites were not to return them here at Jericho. Judah figured that their unusual silence would confuse the defenders at least a bit, adding to the odd presentation the Israelites were making. The attackers continued their circuit, with their full number eventually forming a complete, albeit thin, ring around the city.¹² The defenders continued taunting, along with launching a few arrows, undoubtedly from their strongest archers. The taunts increased when the defenders saw the head of the attackers' column heading off to return to their camp at the end of the circuit. Soon Judah's unit had finished the circuit and began moving toward Gilgal. Judah and his relatives relaxed a bit, relieved that the action, such as it was, had ended for the day.

The day's events repeated themselves six times, though each day the tension decreased for the attackers and the confusion and taunts increased for the defenders. The soldiers at Jericho wondered when the actual attack would finally begin, and the attackers wondered what would happen when they employed the very strange tactics ordered for day seven.

The fateful seventh day finally arrived. For the Israelites, it began like the others, but they knew it would not end at all like the others. The defenders at Jericho knew it was different as soon as the Israelites turned to begin their second circuit of the city. The defenders' vigilance heightened, then gradually diminished as the attackers made circuit after circuit and the morning passed to and beyond midday. Finally the Israelites stopped and faced their target. The defenders remaining on the walls snapped back to full alert, and called for reinforcements. Most of their comrades had been dismissed during the Israelites' long march, and had

of Arad at the southern tip of Canaan made a preemptive and initially successful attack against the invaders. The account (Num. 21:1–3) tells little of the tactics except that Israel vowed to completely destroy this enemy as a gift to their God if he would grant them success. He did, and they fulfilled their vow by completely destroying the attackers' villages, rather like Israel would do at Jericho later. Victories over two kings and their forces at two locations in the Transjordan (Num. 21:21–31, 33–35; see Map 1.1) broke the ability of these forces to resist, and opened up the region for settlement by several of the Israelite tribes. As usual, the accounts include little military data.

Next the Bible records the conquest of Canaan, a significant achievement for an emerging nation without an established homeland. Even though questions about the factuality and timing of the conquest continue to foster much scholastic debate, the Bible appears to present the conquest as taking place in the latter half of the 2nd millennium BC, perhaps in the early 14th or later 13th centuries.¹⁶ Following the unusual tactics commanded at the Jordan River and Jericho as portrayed in the earlier story, the Israelites continue their conquest of at least parts of Canaan. The biblical accounts of these battles are the longest and most detailed at the beginning of the invasion (Josh. 1–10:28) when the Israelites would have been most inexperienced. Likely the author(s) emphasized these early events to highlight the Israelites' obedience of their divinely directed strategies, and especially to make clear how God was helping them accomplish an otherwise seemingly impossible task.

A careful reading of the conquest, along with a good map, reveals the overall Israelite/divine strategy. The attackers first penetrated in east-central Canaan, then gained a hold in the central highlands through victory at Ai and unintentionally by treaty with Gibeon (Josh. 7–9). They finished cutting across the heart of the central hill country with their victory over the enemy coalition attacking Gibeon and driving them westward out of the hills into the western foothills. After thus dividing the country, they conquered the parts, making a swing through the southern foothills and high ground, and then defeating a coalition gathered in the north (Josh. 10–11).

Although the conquest allowed the Israelites to settle in parts of Canaan centered around the central highland, the subsequent period of the Judges demonstrated the often tenuous nature of their hold on the land. The book of Joshua presents the Israelites as acting in unison during the

Babylon, and Persia. Curiously, the lesser, weaker Judah withstood the Mesopotamian forces nearly a century and a half longer than Israel, which the Bible attributes to the mercy of God and his fidelity to his earlier promises to David.

Ultimately Judah would fall, despite God's promises and character. The moral and religious failures of Judah's kings and people would cause God to withdraw his protection. The God who had stopped up the flooding Jordan River so Israel could invade at the nation's birth years before would not stop the flood of Mesopotamian power at the nation's death. God had helped young Israel because young Israel had obeyed the covenant and commands of its God, and it had become the kingdom of God. A much older Israel had long since abandoned that obedience, and would pay the heavy price of conquest and exile. Fortunately, the Israelites worshipped a merciful and faithful God who would first punish and purify, but then forgive and restore, and Israel's history would continue.

NOTES

¹ Image is an Israelite male from a relief done by artists of the Assyrian king Sennacherib portraying the conquest of the Judean city of Lachish at the end of the 8th century. It postdates the time of the Israelite conquest of Canaan and the fictitious Judah by several centuries, but it includes one of the few apparently genuine portrayals of ancient Israelites.

² Compare the experience of a modern U.S. Marine who underwent circumcision during a tour of duty. After he was circumcised, the doctors ordered a week of bed rest, then six weeks of light duty for Corp. Phil Bolanos. When one of his stitches ruptured, he was given three additional weeks of light duty. Thus, this Marine, with the advantages of modern health care, was out of commission for ten weeks. The Bible states simply that the newly circumcised Israelite army remained in camp "until they were healed" (Josh. 5:8). However long that took, they would have been highly vulnerable to enemy attack.

³ The Israelites apparently spoke one of the dialects of what the Bible calls "the language of Canaan" (Isa. 19:18). After they settled in their homeland, the Israelites became one of several different groups in the region that spoke variations

David also had contingents of foreign mercenaries (including Philistines¹) in his pay as bodyguards, undoubtedly to increase the likelihood of their loyalty and to protect himself from local power struggles and potential revolt.

Expanding military needs required reorganization of the army and of the nation itself. By the end of David's reign, he had reorganized the militia into twelve different divisions (1 Chron. 27:1–24) rather than along tribal lines. Each division consisted of 24,000 men (24 *'elep* מֵאֲלָפִים—see discussion under “Size of Army”), with each division serving one month every year. Every division had its corps of officers, including some which utilized old familial ties. The army used officers that commanded family units and tribes (1 Chron. 27:1, 16–22), but these were apparently incorporated into the larger divisional structure, probably to avoid many of the problems inherent in tribal organization. Solomon continued with reorganization of the nation and its military, dividing Israel into twelve districts (1 Kings 4:7–19), rather than the historic tribal divisions (Josh. 13–18), in order to better supply the expanding royal needs, including the extensive military.

OFFICERS

The army needed a corps of officers that would have develop as the army grew. The earliest Israelite military had an overall commander, apparently supported by tribal leadership. Joshua led the army that invaded Canaan, and likely commanded units mustered from clans led by clan leaders (see story at the beginning of chap. 1). Joshua 23:2 mentions Israel's “elders, leaders, judges, and officials,” an unclear and perhaps fluid organization of leadership over various functions in society, probably including the military. During the more settled time of judges, tribal leadership remained in place, and various charismatic leaders rose to take temporary overall command. Likely this arrangement led to significant problems, as the levied troops may well have resisted authority of leaders not from their own tribes.

After Israel transitioned to a monarchy, either the king or an officer appointed by him led the army, usually called “commander of the army” (שַׂר הַצִּבְיָה—*śar haṣṣāḇā*). Abner, Joab, and Beniah filled this role under Saul, David, and Solomon, respectively (1 Sam. 14:50; 1 Kings 1:19; 4:4). Saul led the army during his reign, and crown prince Jonathan

Israelite or Judean chariot (Fig. 2.2) comes from the same Assyrian reliefs that contained the imagery used in Fig. 2.1. This Judean chariot is pictured among the spoils taken from the governor's palace in Lachish, so it likely depicts the governor's ceremonial chariot rather than a typical military chariot of the time. The large, eight-spoked wheels, quiver mounted vertically at the front of the box, and higher rear of the box are all characteristic of Assyrian ceremonial chariots of the time.⁷

Along with chariots, the Israelites may well have used cavalry, though if or when they developed this capability remains unclear. By comparison, the Assyrians were still using chariots at the end of the 8th century, but they had largely switched to cavalry for their mounted troops (see chap. 7). The information in the Bible is frustratingly unclear about the use of equestrian troops. The Bible typically uses the same elastic term “horse” (פָּרָשִׁים/פָּרָשִׁים—*pārāš/pārāšim*) for horses (1 Kings 10:26), chariots (2 Sam. 1:6), chariot riders (Ex. 14:9), and apparently cavalry (1 Kings 9:19; 2 Kings 9:17). Perhaps the biblical authors used it to indicate horse-related troops of all types, making it often difficult or impossible for the modern reader to discern which is meant. Though cavalry would seem much more useful

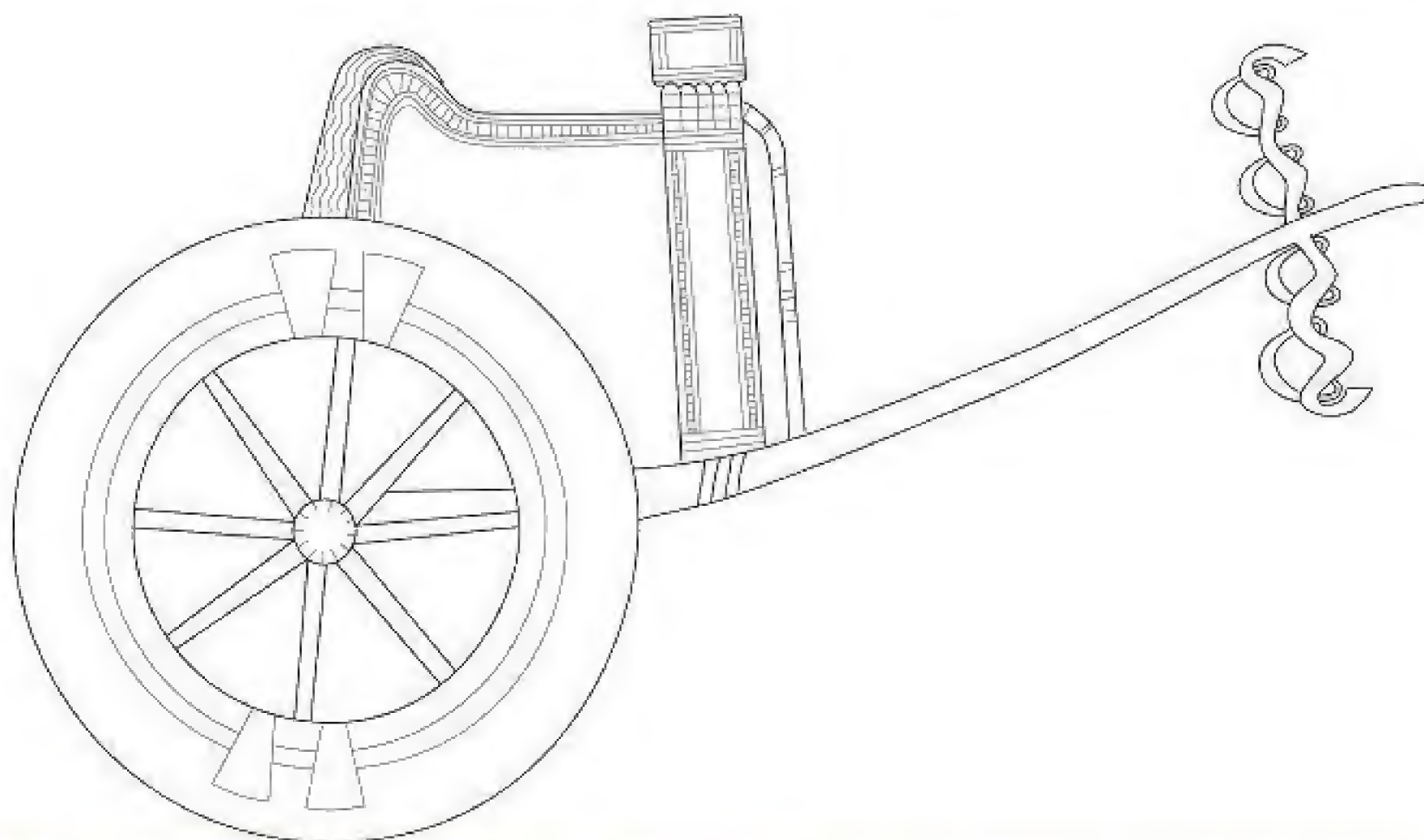


Fig. 2.2 – Judean ceremonial chariot, ca. 700 BC. Note large wheel(s), vertically-mounted quiver, and 4-horse yoke. Compare Assyrian chariot in Fig. 7.2

other two terms mean? In summary, understanding *’elep*h as “clan” shrinks the apparently large numbers of troops to a more realistic but vague size, but it doesn’t resolve all the associated problems.

Regardless of how one understands the numbers associated with *’elep*h, the biblical texts often give the size of Israelite forces. The numbers for Israel at the time of the conquest and judges range from 36 soldiers killed in one battle (Josh. 7:5) to 400 *’elep*h for the entire army (Judg. 20:2). During the early monarchy, Saul had as few as 3 and as many as 330 *’elep*h soldiers (1 Sam. 13:2; 11:8). David began with a personal army of 400 when he was an outlaw (1 Sam. 22:2), but ended with 1,570 *’elep*h when king (1 Chron. 21:5). Solomon accumulated 1,400 chariots (1 Kings 10:26—here “thousand” works well for *’elep*h) and 4 *’elep*h stalls for 12 *’elep*h horses (2 Chron. 9:25). Later numbers range as high as 400 *’elep*h soldiers in Judah and 800 *’elep*h in Israel (2 Chron. 13:3).

ROLE OF KING

As they commanded these various numbers of troops, Joshua, the judges, and later the kings demonstrated the key role that military leaders played in leading Israel. Joshua and the judges led the nation primarily because of the need for military leadership at their time. While the kings also led in civil and religious affairs, the biblical texts sometimes portray military effectiveness as their most important task. One sees this in the initial demand for a king (1 Sam 8:20), in the public recognition of Saul as king after he led the rescue of Jabesh Gilead (1 Sam. 11), and when David overshadowed Saul through his military exploits (1 Sam. 17–18, esp. 18:16).

Israel’s kings often took personal command of their armies. The accounts of Saul’s battles always portray him at the head of his troops. In at least one case, he wore a crown and armband (2 Sam. 1:10), much as later kings typically wore royal robes to identify themselves (1 Kings 22:30). David rose to power largely because of his effective military leadership, but then shared that responsibility with designated commanders (see “Officers” above). Later in his career, David’s troops insisted that he stay behind to avoid danger (2 Sam. 18:3–4; 21:17), undoubtedly to avoid the problem of losing the commander in chief in a culture where power was highly concentrated at the top (as in 1 Kings 22:34–36).

Along with leading the military, the king also filled numerous other

curved swords that are neither of the main types—sickle-swords or long, straight swords. As with the Israelite chariot shown in Fig. 2.2, these swords apparently comprised part of the plunder from the governor's palace at Lachish, suggesting that they may have been ceremonial, and thus not necessarily the same style as normal swords. See also Fig. 2.4 for discussion and possible faint depiction of a straight sword from about the same time period.

Spear Although the Bible mentions the sword more often, some of the frequent references to spears and shields (1 Chron. 12:8; 2 Chron. 14:8; 25:5) suggest that these were standard issue for Israelite troops during the monarchy. Spears were made with long, wooden shafts perhaps five feet long (Fig. 2.1—right) and pointed, sharpened metal heads of different types (Fig. 1.2).¹⁴ Even the tail end of the spear could kill. Since soldiers often stuck their spears in the ground when not in use (1 Sam. 26:7), they probably sharpened the end or affixed a metal point to make this easier, thus enabling attack with the tail as well (2 Sam. 2:23).

Soldiers used spears as piercing weapons in hand-to-hand fighting. While one could throw a spear, as Saul seemed fond of doing (1 Sam. 18:10–11; 19:10; 20:33), it served primarily as a thrusting weapon for heavy infantry. Massed infantry arranged in battle lines often carried spears and large shields (or swords or possibly other close-range weapons as well). They often faced similarly armed enemy troops, and when the opposing lines closed, the spear-bearing soldiers would try to impale the enemy soldiers opposite them.

Although the spear appears frequently in texts from the later monarchy, it did not early on. Curiously, it does not appear at all in Joshua and only once in Judges (5:8—stating that Israel had none), perhaps suggesting the early Israelites did not have the blacksmiths to produce the metal heads. The spear does appear frequently in the stories of Saul (1 Sam. 22:6; 2 Sam. 1:6), as well in stories of hand-to-hand fighting during the time of David (1 Chron. 11:20, 23), and then most frequently in general references during the later monarchy.

Other Short-Range Weapons The Bible also mentions a few other short-range weapons such as axes and darts. Ancient Near Eastern peoples often used axes for cutting wood or even stone (1 Kings 6:7), and their armies sometimes used them as slashing weapons, especially in Egypt (see chap. 4 for discussion

Imagery from the biblical period provides a bit more information. The Assyrian reliefs portraying the fall of the Judean city of Lachish c. 700 BC show several Judean archers (Fig. 2.5),²⁵ though none clearly enough to determine the types of bows they are using. The composite image of the archer in Fig. 2.1 is based on these reliefs. A seal uncovered recently in Jerusalem²⁶ may offer more help. The seal depicts an archer, possibly Judean. He is barefoot, with head covering and clothing similar to the 8th century Judeans portrayed in the Assyrian reliefs of Lachish. A quiver hangs on his back, and a straight sword apparently projects back and downward from his waist on the left side, where a right-handed man would place it. The archer draws his bow, curved at each end like a high-quality composite bow, and aims slightly upward. The inscription on the seal reads, “Belonging to Hagab [grasshopper²⁷].”

DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT

Along with these different types of short-, medium-, and long-range weapons, the Israelite army also had to provide their soldiers with defensive equipment. Soldiers in all armies needed protection in battle, and the Israelites used physical protection typical of the time, as well as

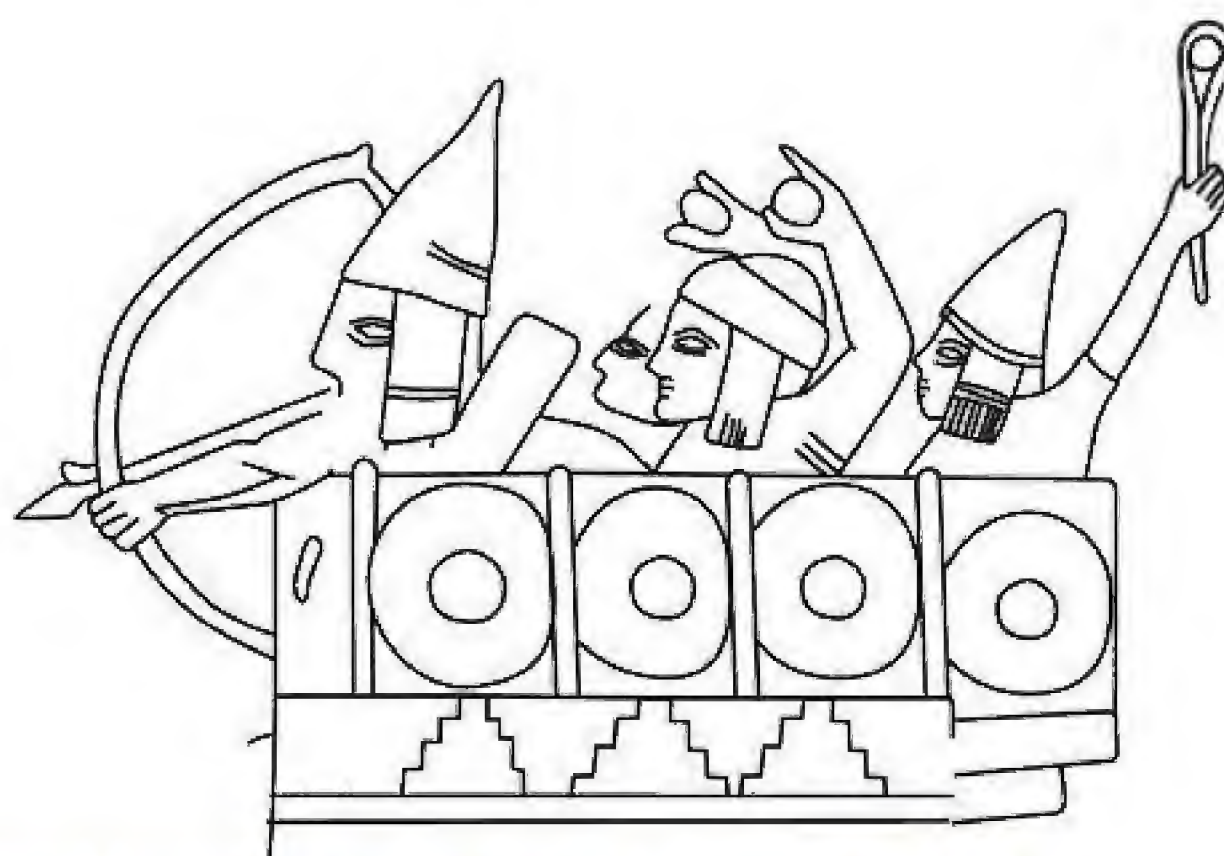


Fig. 2.5 – Israelite defenders at Lachish ca. 700 BC
Note helmeted archer and slinger; round shields on wall

Under the skilled and blessed leadership of the new king David, Israel's fortunes quickly reversed. David not only withstood continued Philistine aggression, he turned and subdued this longstanding foe. He then shifted Israel from a defensive to an offensive posture, leading the Israelite army on a series of wars of conquest. Israel conquered most of its neighbors and subjected them to servitude and the obligation to pay tribute annually, making Israel fabulously wealthy for a frustratingly brief period of time.

Following the death of David's son Solomon, the nation divided and lost most of David's gains. The two kingdoms quickly found themselves fighting both a civil war and renewed defensive wars. They survived these early challenges and tried to go back on the offensive. Israel and Judah sought to re-conquer and hold as much foreign land as they could for as long as possible. When they succeeded, they received immediate plunder. When they maintained control, they received annual tribute like in the days of David and Solomon.

Throughout the rest of the divided kingdom, the two nations fought both offensive and defensive wars—reflecting their rising and falling fortunes—with the stronger northern kingdom of Israel better able to conquer and hold outlying regions. The two countries used various strategies to achieve their military goals. These included forming coalitions, hiring mercenaries, and offering bribes. Occasionally they bribed attackers to withdraw, or bribed a distant greater power like Assyria to attack an antagonistic neighbor. Though these strategies often succeeded, one reads of God voicing displeasure through prophetic messages to the offending king. Overall, the nations' general military strategies resembled those of their neighbors, with the important addition of a God who showed more concern with covenantal fidelity than national success, and who had the power to bring about good or bad for his people through military and other means.

Motivation As they worked through these overall strategies, what motivated the ancient Israelites to risk their lives in battle? As mentioned earlier, the Israelite army often fought at the command and with the blessing of Yahweh, whose support probably served as one of the soldiers' major motivations. The desire for honor and for material gain would have factored in as well.³⁰ The Israelites under Joshua fought to gain a homeland, homes, material goods, and perhaps wives (Deut. 21:10–14). The cry, "To the plunder" (2 Kings 3:23) probably reflects a sentiment that has motivated soldiers in

forces gave less glory to God. While such an emphasis makes for good devotional reading, it offers the reader less information about how the more capable Israelite armies operated during the monarchy.

One also finds that Israelite tactics changed with their increasing capabilities. Since early Israel often faced foes with superior forces, their early tactics reflect those of guerilla forces—moving at night, making surprise attacks, etc. Later on, one finds the Israelite military maneuvering like a major force—forming phalanxes of massed infantry to engage similarly grouped enemy troops, or using chariotry against enemy chariotry before the infantry engaged.

Battles in the Open

Pitched battles in the ancient Near East between relatively evenly matched forces probably resulted in short but decisive engagements. Armies would arrange themselves for combat with phalanxes or rows of massed heavy infantry carrying shields and short-range weapons in front, and archers (and slingers if they used them) in the rear. If the armies had chariots and/or cavalry, these may have assembled on the wings. As the two armies began to close, equestrian troops from both sides likely skirmished with one another using bows and javelins, plus firing on the opposing infantry, probing for weaknesses. The archers would commence firing as soon as the enemy was within range, shooting over their own troops into the massed enemy. When the sides got too close, the equestrian troops would withdraw, the archers would have to stop to avoid hitting their own men, and the two phalanxes of massed infantry would collide.

The fighting must have been intense. The heavy infantry fought shoulder-to-shoulder with their comrades, with additional rows of troops pressing from behind to try to force their side forward. The later Greek historian Xenophon described such fighting by saying, “Smashing their shields together, they shoved, fought, slew, and died.” If the troops had no way to rotate to the rear, a tactic the Romans later perfected, such fighting probably couldn’t last more than half an hour before physical and emotional exhaustion would take over.³² (Note the biblical references to such fatigue, such as a warrior’s hand growing so tired it froze to his weapon—2 Sam. 23:10.) Eventually, troops either gained the upper hand or else lost through death or injury, surrender, retreat, or panic and flight.

Once the momentum clearly swung in one direction, the winners typically won decisively. Fleeing troops usually discarded their shields, and perhaps weapons and armor as well. This allowed them to

eventually would be exhausted. Famine and starvation resulted; food costs skyrocketed, and the people sometimes resorted to cannibalism (2 Kings 6:24–30). In addition, the inhabitants would have to bury the dead inside the city walls, leading to pollution of the water supply and widespread disease.

AFTER THE BATTLE

Following a successful battle on a city or in the open, the Israelite military armies collected spoils, rewarded their troops, and disposed of captured enemy leaders.

Plunder The Bible recognizes that Israel's troops took plunder as a reward for military success. Israelite soldiers often enjoyed spoils including women, sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels, and clothing (Judg. 5:30; 1 Sam. 27:9), but one finds this emphasized less in the Bible than in the records of some other contemporary nations. The practice varies even in the Bible. In some cases, the Israelites killed the people and kept the plunder (Josh. 8:22–27), or killed the soldiers and kept the women, children, and other goods (Num. 31:7–12). Other times, by contrast, the Israelites killed all a city's inhabitants and totally destroyed its goods as a gift to God, like at Jericho. Joshua additionally pronounced a curse on anyone who would rebuild the city (Josh. 6:21–27).

Rewards Israelite soldiers also could earn various rewards for great feats performed in battle, though this, too, varies. Caleb promised his daughter in marriage to the one who led the conquest of the city of Kiriath Sepher (Judg. 1:12–13). Saul also offered his daughter plus other rewards to the one who defeated Goliath, as discussed earlier. Joab received his position as commander of the army for leading the attack on Jebus/Jerusalem (1 Chron. 11:6). Joab later promised silver and a warrior's belt for killing an enemy leader (2 Sam. 18:11).

Like in other nations such as Egypt, Israelite soldiers cut off body parts from slain enemies to prove kills. David needed the foreskins³⁶ of dead Philistines to prove his success (1 Sam. 18:25–27). The inhabitants of two cities thought Gideon had in his possession the hands of two enemy leaders, indicating their deaths (Judg. 8:6–15). Often severed heads served as proof of death as well (1 Sam. 17:51–54; 1 Chron. 10:8–10).

¹⁷ Experiments conducted for Emperor Napoleon gave a distance of twenty meters for throwing a simple javelin, 80 meters for one with an added looped cord. A similar but different test yielded an increase from 25 to 65 meters (E. Norman Gardiner, "Throwing the Javelin," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 27 (1907): 257–8). Gardiner also notes that spears sometimes also had a similar attachment as a handle, which may be in view in 1 Samuel 17:7. There, the author of 1 Samuel describes Goliath's spear as resembling "a weaver's rod," perhaps his way of describing such an attached loop—which the Israelites apparently didn't use. See also Rodriquez, "Arsenal," 134–6.

¹⁸ Since all the references in the Old Testament to left-handed people indicate they were from the tribe of Benjamin, I asked geneticist Joanna R. Klein, Ph.D., if a group of related people could have a genetic presupposition toward left-handedness. She responded in part:

"... The factors that influence handedness have been studied for years, although there is still no clear understanding of all the determinants. Current research suggests that handedness is influenced by a complex interplay of both environmental and genetic factors. Studies of twins suggest that genetic effects account for 25% of the variation of handedness and unique environmental effects account for the remainder. Some proposed environmental effects on handedness are societal, such as modeling handedness, forced handedness and stigmatization.

"Other studies based on pre-natal ultrasounds show that handedness formation occurs prenatally, before societal influences on handedness are present. . . . Familial aggregation of handedness is also consistent with a genetic component. In one study, it was found that two left handed parents have a 26% chance of having a left-handed child, while the prevalence is 20% with one left handed and one right handed parent and 10% with two right handed parents. . . Most recently, genetic mapping studies have provided support for a genetic basis of handedness. Several genes and chromosomal locations are associated with being left-handed (LRRTM1, 2p12, 12p21–23 and 10q26). . . In summary, from my review of the literature, I believe there is a genetic component to handedness, but it is very complex interaction between multiple genes that is influenced heavily by environmental factors" (personal communication 21 Jan. 2011).

Perhaps the Benjamites had a genetic predisposition to left-handedness, and they may have also encouraged the trait as a point of tribal distinction and pride.

¹⁹ See Manfred Korfmann, "The Sling as a Weapon," *Scientific Americana* 229:4 (Oct. 1973): 37–40; as well as Rodriquez, "Arsenal," 235–50 and Appendix 4. Lead

served in the military full time. Several generations ago, their commitment to this service had earned for the family the property and fields that supported them well through the years. But the commitment also came with an obligation: at least one member of the family, normally the eldest son, must serve in the ranks of the pharaoh's armies. Often those sons had served as officers, and now even an officer in the chariotry, the best of the best of Egypt's forces. Their property and position had given the family wealth and prestige—plus pressure to live up to such status. "Mighty-on-the-Battlefield" had always secretly wondered if he would be able to live up to the pressure and to his name. Today he had.

Nakt-her-Peri also thought of the training and planning that had led up to the day's battle. His family lived near the military compound at Memphis in northern Egypt (Map 3.1), so when it came time to report, he didn't have far to go. He made it through the basic military training with little difficulty and won selection to the prestigious chariot corps as hoped. Then his training intensified. Egypt's chariots, like most of the time, carried two soldiers, a driver and a chariot-warrior (Fig. 3.1). Each chariot operated in conjunction with other chariots and supporting foot soldiers called "runners." Nakt-her-Peri focused on the skills of the chariot-warrior, of course, but he also had to learn the work of a driver. One never knew what could happen in battle and what a warrior might need to do. Thus he learned to handle horses and drive as well as how to fight with sword and spear. Nakt-her-Peri also became proficient with the

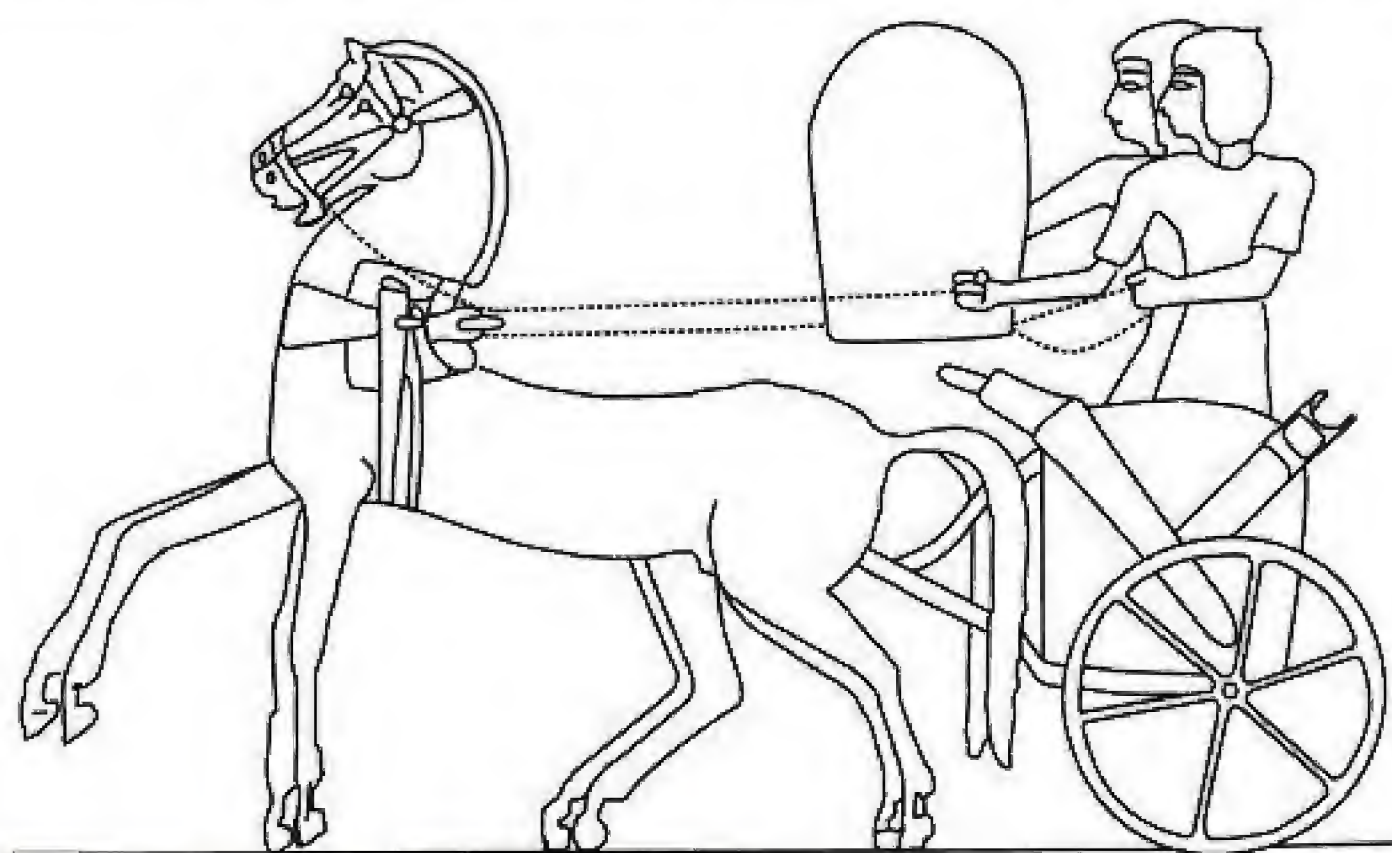
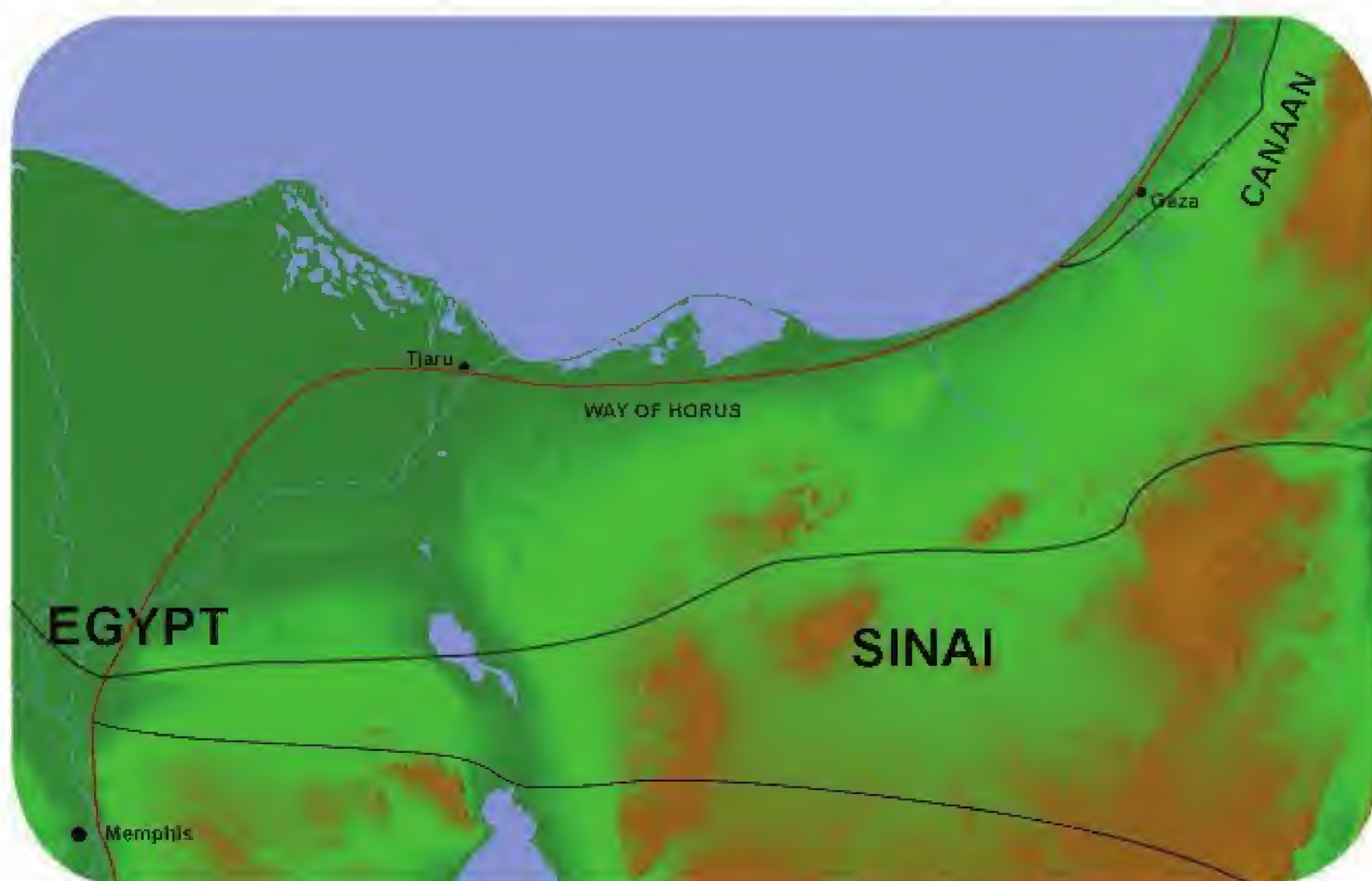


Fig. 3.1 – Chariot with driver & warrior

the fourth month of winter in Thutmose's twenty-second year (including the years of Hatshepsut's dominance). They joined with the other troops that had assembled at the fort of Tjaru on the border of Egypt (Map 3.2). He could not have felt more proud or excited. The young chariot officer rode away from Memphis at the head of his unit and with the rest of the large force, and the vast army started out across the northern Sinai Peninsula on the route known as the Way of Horus.

Their mission was clear. They were to enter Canaan from the south, then find and destroy the coalition of Canaanites and Syrians undoubtedly assembling to meet them. The vile prince of Kadesh in northern Syria had led the rebellion against Thutmose's rule, and would be assembling as many princes (rulers of city-states) and their armies as possible. Stakes were high: Egypt could either retain control over this large region along the eastern Mediterranean, or lose these lands and the wealth that such control promised. The gods would decide, and many mortals would die. Nakt-her-Peri knew that he could be among them, but he also knew not to dwell on the possibility.

Most of the journey toward the battlefield went smoothly, particularly the trip across the Sinai. After ten days of little but heat and sand, the



Map 3.2 – Egypt to Canaan

and was replaced by courage and greed. The Battle of Megiddo would obviously become a smashing victory, and now they hungered to gain glory and loot. Nakt-her-Peri's chariot approached an overturned Canaanite chariot, and the two-man crew was desperately trying to right it. Nakt-her-Peri killed the bare-chested driver with a single arrow from his composite bow, but he needed three more to wound and down the leather-clad chariot-warrior⁵ as he fled on foot. The driver stopped the chariot and Nakt-her-Peri leaped off with his sword to kill his opponent. Quickly accomplishing his task, he then leaned over, cut off the dead enemy's hand, and ran back to do the same to the dead Canaanite driver. He jumped back on his chariot and dumped the bloody body parts into a bag. Severed hands of slain enemy troops were proof of enemy killed, and they guaranteed reward in the ceremony after a victorious battle. Nakt-her-Peri thus assured himself of receiving the coveted "Gold of Valor" from the pharaoh.⁶ Though the battle had just begun, "Mighty-on-the-Battlefield" had already lived up to his name.

Unfortunately for the Egyptians, the great victory dissipated almost as quickly as it had materialized. As their troops pursued the Canaanites fleeing toward Megiddo, the Egyptians passed through the main enemy camp. Like Nakt-her-Peri, many of the Egyptians found themselves in their first major battle, and discipline broke down. Greed took over, and many stopped to plunder the Canaanite camp, allowing most of the enemy to reach Megiddo alive. The people in Megiddo had already closed and bolted the gate of the walled city, leaving the soldiers outside, frantically clamoring to be let in. Although the city's inhabitants refused to open the gate, they did rescue many by lowering improvised ropes made from articles of clothing tied together and pulling the troops up to safety. Far too many of the enemy escaped this way, including the prince of Kadesh and most of the other princes as well. The smashing Egyptian victory shrank to a clear victory as the Egyptians took possession of the battlefield and the plunder, but with the majority of the enemy troops alive in the temporary safety of the city. The Egyptian officers slowly restored order as their army surrounded Megiddo, and they began preparations for the long, arduous task of laying siege to the city.

Although the siege of Megiddo lasted a grueling seven months, the city had to be captured, given the site's strategic location and the importance of crushing the rebellion led by the princes who had taken refuge inside. In the words of Thutmose, "Every chieftain of all northern lands

time of Solomon (10th century BC), Egypt had captured the important Canaanite city of Gezer on the western border of Israel (1 Kings 9:16). This implies Egyptian strength, but the same account also shows that Egypt was weak enough that it married one of its princesses to Solomon, king of the rising power of Israel. Such an arrangement would have been unthinkable during the earlier periods of Egyptian dominance. Then, shortly after Solomon's death ca. 930 BC, Pharaoh Shishak had enough power to venture north with his army to plunder both Judah and Israel (1 Kings 14:25–26), but he wasn't strong enough to maintain control of the area. Several centuries later, shortly before Judah's final collapse, Pharaoh Neco took his army all the way to Carchemish on the Euphrates River. He there joined up with the Assyrian army (2 Kings 23:29), but their combined forces couldn't defeat the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar and prevent Babylon from taking control of the ancient Near East.

Although the Old Testament closes with Egypt having faded to the status of a second-rate power, the nation did play a meaningful role in the region's military and political events throughout most of Old Testament history. This is especially true from the time of the New Kingdom on, when the interplay between the Israelites and the Egyptian military was most significant. Thus, a description of the Egyptian military from this time should help readers of the Bible better understand a number of the events of the Old Testament in their context.

These chapters will describe the Egyptian military during this time by using information gleaned from written texts, artistic representations of war (some quite dramatic and informative), and surviving artifacts such as weapons and chariots. Relevant texts include royal inscriptions, official chronicles, personal accounts of individual soldiers from tombs, and the records of international correspondence. Some of these texts were originally written on perishable materials such as parchment or leather. Others were inscribed on the walls of temples throughout Egypt, often alongside pictorial reliefs of the pharaohs and the battles in which they invariably claimed victory. Still other relevant images decorated items such as the pharaohs' chariots.

The various reliefs from the walls of temples offer some of best information about warfare during this period, although curiously most date from the 19th and 20th Dynasties rather than the more militaristic 18th Dynasty. The great pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty, like Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, left written records of their accomplishments, but apparently no

military camps, assigned clothing and provisions, and conscripted into the army as auxiliary infantry. By the 19th Dynasty, mercenaries and auxiliaries may have outnumbered Egyptians in the army.¹⁶

MILITARY BRANCHES

As noted in the preceding section, the Egyptian military had a well-developed but sometimes unclear structure, which undoubtedly changed over time. References to the different branches of the army usually just use general terms like “infantry,” “chariotry,” and later on, “Sherden”¹⁷ (apparently a general reference to mercenaries), making it difficult to determine the exact structure at any given time. Nevertheless, the Egyptians’ organizational ability and military structure clearly played an important part in their military successes during the New Kingdom.

Infantry

As with most armies throughout history, foot soldiers comprised the largest part of the Egyptian military. References sometimes distinguish between the less well-trained and more lightly armed “recruits” (draftees) and the “heavy-armed troops” (professionals), who often carried battle-axes along with shields and spears (Fig. 3.7—lower register.). Professionals trained as archers made up another part of the infantry. Some records also refer to special crack troops called “elite troops,” “braves of the king,” or simply “braves,” who spearheaded assaults. The accounts of the Battle of Kadesh in 1275 BC note the key role played by *na’arun*, or “youth,” apparently a select unit. The *na’arun* were off to the west when the fighting at Kadesh started, but they arrived just in time to rescue Ramesses II and the Egyptian army from disaster.¹⁸

Often the infantry units were organized according to types of weapons. Infantrymen typically carried shields plus one or two of the following: spear, sword, battle-axe, throw-stick, mace, or metal rod (see Fig. 3.7 and further description under Weapons). The heavy infantry in the lower register of Fig. 3.7 carry the typical shields (with holes for better vision) and spears, plus battle-axes and one with a rod, (see chap. 4, “Short-Range Weapons”). The soldiers in the upper register all carry bows plus battle-axes or throw-sticks, and the officer in front bears a military standard (Fig. 3.8).

The basic organization of smaller to larger units may have been squad-platoon-company-battalion-division, though the information doesn’t allow for certainty. Squads made up the basic fighting unit,

Such requests always petition for chariots or horses in multiples of ten, suggesting that chariot units may have had ten each. These units bore names such as “Manifest in Justice” or “The Phoenix.” Undoubtedly a number of units, apparently five, served together as a squadron, and a number of squadrons made up larger tactical units. The evidence, however, is scanty and may have changed as the number of chariots increased over time.²⁸

A corresponding hierarchy of officers supplemented by support staff led the chariot corps. The charioteers in each unit apparently served under the “First Charioteer” or “Charioteer of the Residence,” the company under the “Standard Bearer of Chariot-Warriors,” and the largest unit perhaps under the “Commander of a Chariot Host.” By the end of the 18th Dynasty, an officer with the title “Overseer of Horses” commanded the entire chariot corps.²⁹ These officers received help from a hierarchy of “Stablemasters” who were responsible for the feeding, upkeep, and training of the active and replacement horses. The lowest “Stablemaster” had charge over one or more teams of horses. Further support came from craftsmen who repaired the chariots.³⁰

In addition to its military importance, the chariot also developed into a symbol of prestige and power. In the contemporary communication between nations, kings often wished one another that all would go well with “you . . . your household . . . *your horses, your chariots* . . .” (emphasis added).³¹ Kings likewise traveled by chariot (cf. 1 Sam. 8:11; 1 Kings 12:18). Pharaohs learned to fight as chariot-warriors as part of their training, often fought at the head of a chariot division, and commonly had themselves portrayed shooting from a chariot in reliefs of battle and hunting scenes.

The chariot’s prestige extended to non-royal chariot troops as well. Often chariot drivers and chariot-warriors were volunteers from the upper strata of Egyptian society and went through special training to learn archery, driving, and tactics. Their positions did not protect them from hardships, however. One scribal satire refers to the “miserable office, the chariot-warrior of the chariotry.”³² Chariot-warriors had to endure blows from superiors, suffer bites from horses, overcome the logistical challenges of getting the chariot through difficult terrain, and keep the sometimes-delicate machines in good repair.

Egyptian sources seem to reflect a growth in the numbers of chariots over time, although they tell more about the numbers of captured enemy chariots than about those belonging to Egypt. As noted earlier,

Thutmose III captured 924 chariots at Megiddo in the mid-15th century. His successor, Amenhotep II, recorded plunder of 730 and 1,092 chariots from two Asiatic campaigns later the same century. In 1275 BC, Ramesses II faced 2,500 or 3,500 chariots of the Hittites and their allies at Kadesh. Thus the numbers of large enemy chariot forces rose from approximately one thousand to a few thousand over this period of two centuries.

In addition to their infantry and chariotry, the Egyptians also had a navy, although warships and naval battles *per se* were largely unknown³³ until Ramesses III fought the Sea Peoples in 1179 BC. The Egyptians had long used boats for transportation on the Nile River, of course, but their military use was primarily confined to transporting troops who fought on land, as well as communicating and hauling freight. The pharaoh would ride on board ship when accompanying the army, while the land troops advanced on either side.³⁴

Navy

The Egyptians also sailed beyond Egypt, and used ships for military transport northward to the Levantine coast. Thutmose III in the mid-18th Dynasty used maritime transport as part of a well-constructed strategy that ultimately extended the Egyptian empire to the Euphrates. In a series of conquests that lasted over eighteen years, the pharaoh steadily advanced northward. He secured the harbors of Phoenicia and seized ships to return to Egypt at the end of his fifth campaign. Beginning the following year, the army regularly sailed to Syria to avoid the tiring and time-consuming march through Palestine. Ships also brought prisoners and spoils back to Egypt.³⁵ On one campaign, Thutmose III built ships of cedar on the Phoenician coast, placed them on carts to be transported to the Euphrates, and used them to ferry his army across the river.

The Egyptians lacked most of the native woods necessary for building ships required for their campaigns, so they had to import lumber or entire finished ships from Nubia in the south and Phoenicia and Syria in the north. Eventually the Egyptians learned to do their own shipbuilding.³⁶ Although the location of their shipbuilding during this period is largely unknown, some records have been found referring to a naval dockyard called Peru-nefer (“Good Departure”) that was located on the Nile near Memphis. Beginning as a small dock, Thutmose III expanded it into an extensive installation that included shipyards, temples, and rest houses for receiving foreign envoys. Both Thutmose III and Amenhotep II used Peru-nefer as their base for transporting troops to

Palestine and Syria. The worship of the Canaanite gods Baal and Astarte at Peru-nefer apparently reflects the importance of the Phoenician shipwrights and foreign craftsmen brought in by Thutmose III.³⁷

These foreign shipwrights taught Egyptian craftsmen, who eventually built different styles of ships such as “Keftiyew (perhaps Crete) ships,” “Byblos ships,” or “Sektu ships.” Such names may indicate the boats’ home-ports, or where that style of ships was originally built, or the types of ships that typically travelled to those locations. Different styles served different uses. Those used along the Levantine coast only had to travel short distances between harbors, so they were designed for large carrying capacity rather than speed. They had no superstructure, and were broad with large storage areas for cargo, including chariots, and occasionally stalls for horses. Ships used along the Red Sea (Fig. 3.9), by contrast, had to traverse great lengths of barren and waterless coastline, so they had the longer lines and larger sails of a fast-running galley. Ships built for travel on the Nile had to be light, with shallow drafts to navigate the river’s many sandbars and the rocks of the cataracts. These had cabins with steps leading to the roof for lookouts to survey the countryside and the river ahead. Boats used on the Nile ranged from opulent royal flagships to ordinary merchant ships

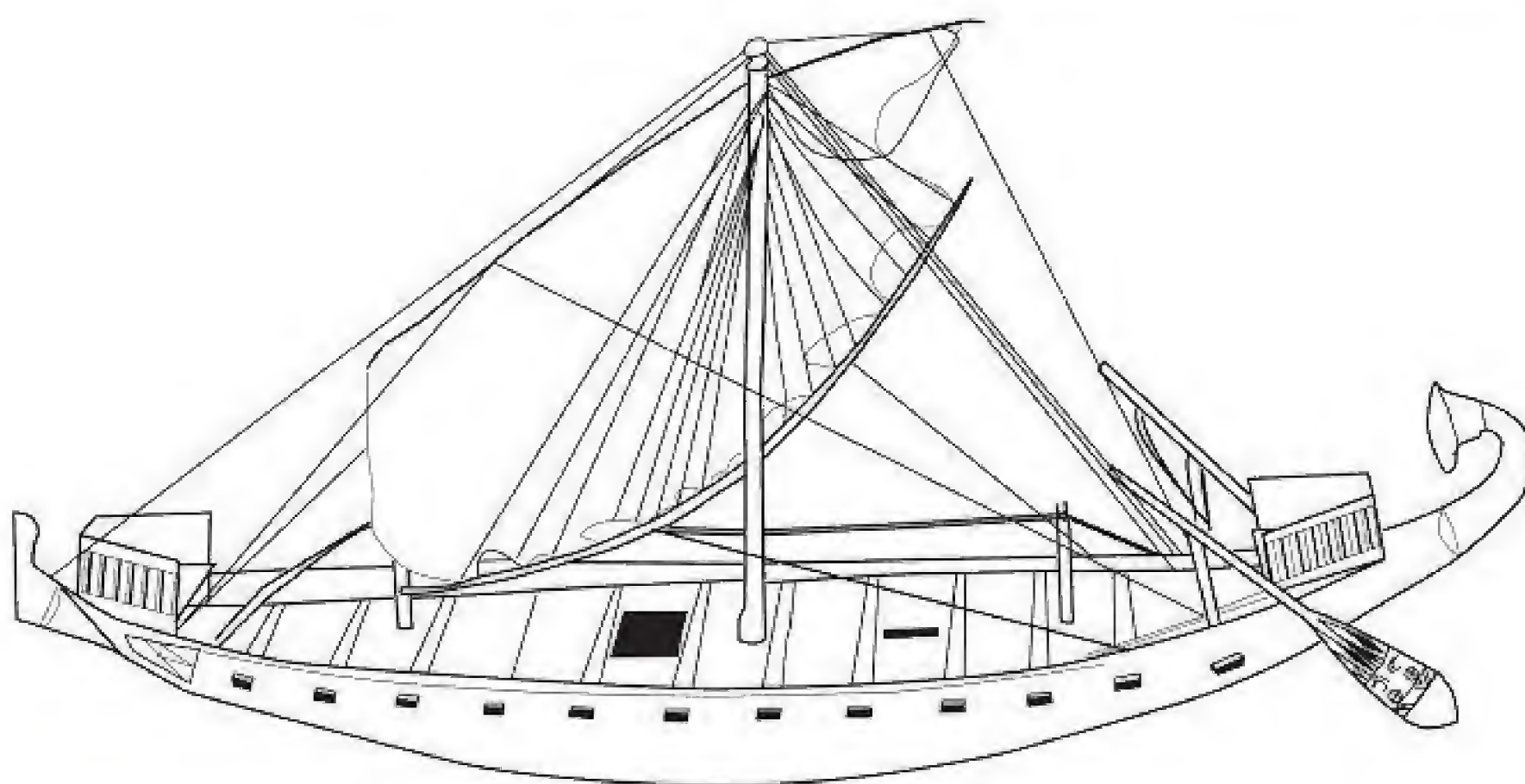


Fig. 3.9 – Seagoing ship from 18th Dynasty

Modeled after relief of ships used on Red Sea. Powered by single large sail or oars (not shown). steered by pair of paddles. Deck beams pass through & secured on outside of hull.

that transported the goods of the empire.³⁸ Pictures show ships of different kinds with crews of seven to seventeen, but the pictures may be stylized and the numbers not reliable. Like in the infantry and chariotry, naval units bore names like “Pacifier of the Atun” or “The Wild Bull.”

As demonstrated in Ramesses III’s portrayal of the naval battle with the Sea Peoples in 1179 BC, Egypt eventually did develop true warships with marine fighting units. In the relief, the prow of each Egyptian ship is shaped like the head of a lioness with the head of an Asiatic in its mouth, perhaps functioning as a ram (Figs. 3.10, 4.10). Raised bulwarks along the sides protected the rowers who helped power and maneuver the ships. The single sail was raised rather than lowered, apparently to allow more fighting room on deck. Raised gangways and square structures in the bow and stern provided places for marine warriors to fight, pictured with bow and arrow, spear, metal rod, javelin, and mace. A lone figure in each fighting top slings stones at the enemy. One Egyptian soldier throws a four-armed grappling hook. It grasps the rigging of an

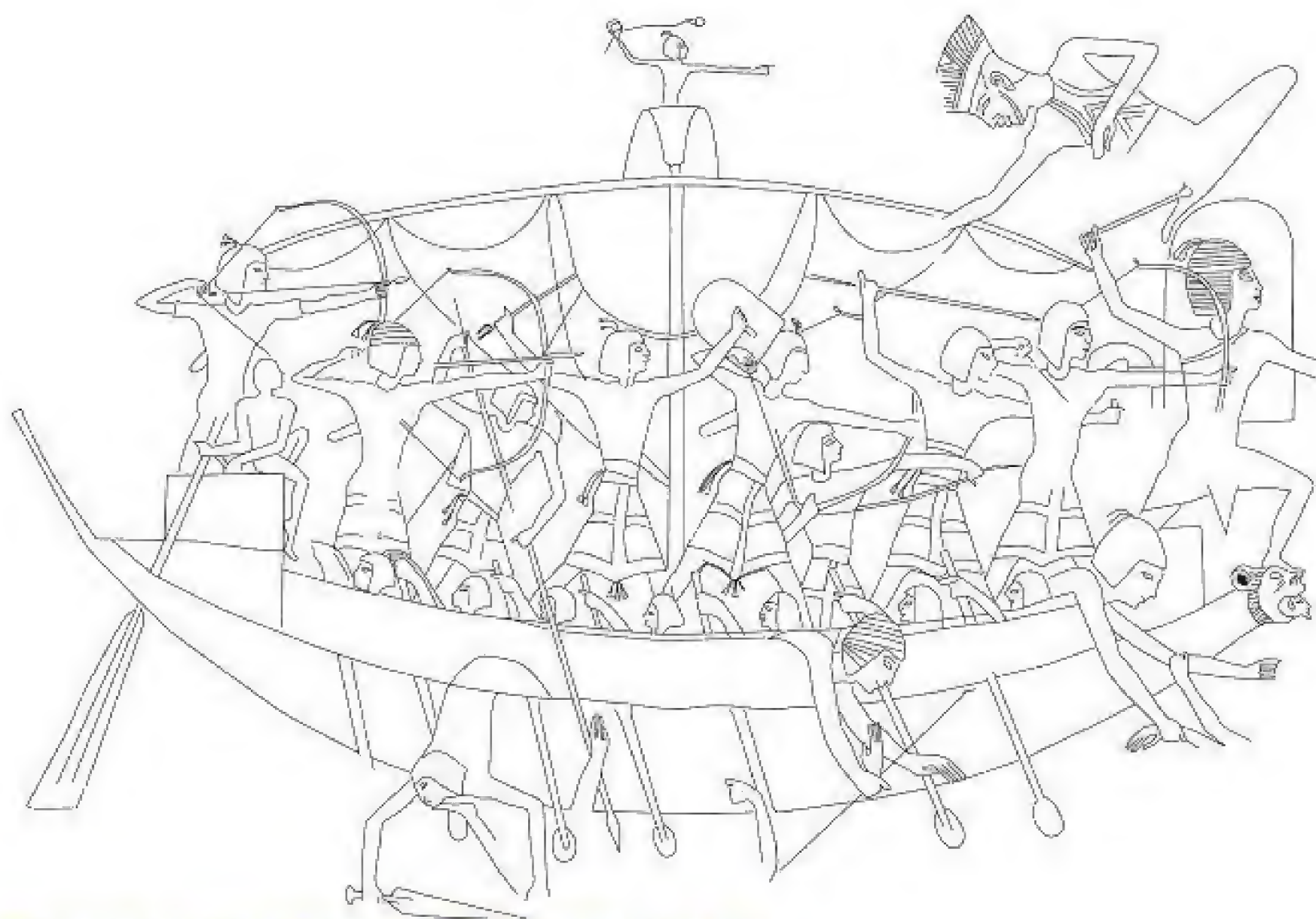


Fig. 3.10 – Warship battling Sea Peoples 1179 BC

Fig. 4.10 includes color depiction.

The number of men who served in the powerful military, like so many other aspects of Egyptian military history, cannot be determined with certainty. General statements (“a numerous army”), obvious exaggerations (“millions and hundred-thousands of men”), and especially incomplete data make it impossible to fix the size of the Egyptian army in most cases. This is typical for ancient Near Eastern cultures. With the significant exception of the Bible, ancient data about numbers of troops is typically fragmentary or nonexistent, perhaps reflecting a general disinterest in such information. While modern western cultures often value statistics, ancient Near Easterners and modern Middle Easterners often do not. The Bible appears to be the exception to this rule, with its many large numbers of troops, as discussed in chapter 2.

Egyptian records rarely give precise numbers of troops, but at least on one occasion, they indicate a total of four divisions in the field for a major battle. Since a division apparently was comprised of 5,000 soldiers,⁴² one can easily infer a total of 20,000 Egyptians at the Battle of Kadesh in 1275 BC. On that occasion, Ramesses II clearly had four divisions (named Amon—led by the pharaoh, Re, Ptah, and Sutekh) fighting against the Hittites. They faced an army of Hittites and their allies whose numbers are known only from Egyptian records, perhaps not the most reliable source. Egyptian accounts apparently state that the Hittites mustered 2,500 + 1,000 chariots (x 3 soldiers per Hittite chariot = 10,500) and another 8,000–9,000 infantry.⁴³ This suggests that the Hittites also had approximately 20,000 troops when these two superpowers fought for control of the northern Levant in the 13th century BC.

The records of Merenptah and Ramesses III fighting against Libyan invaders also furnish numbers of troops, but this time only of enemy killed. At these battles, which took place in the late 13th and early 12th centuries after Egyptian power had already begun to decline, they presumably could have mustered only a smaller army. The records state that in 1208 BC they killed 9,376 enemy and captured 9,111 swords (apparently from the slain). In 1182 BC they report 12,535 killed, plus more than 1,000 prisoners. In 1176 BC the Libyans suffered 2,175 dead and 2,052 taken captive.⁴⁴ Assuming these figures are correct, the Libyans fielded armies of at least 9,300 in the first attack, 13,500 in the second, and 4,200 in the third. How many more they could have had is unclear, as is the number of Egyptians they faced.

chariot six times against the attacking Hittite chariots at Kadesh. Other stories sound more like propaganda than fact, as when Amenhotep II claimed to have guarded a group of prisoners alone all night, surrounded by ditches filled with fire.⁴⁷

In leading the Egyptian army, the pharaoh was fulfilling one of his primary responsibilities as king. The pharaoh had to uphold truth, justice, and right order, in part by using the country's military to protect Egypt from the hostile barbarians of the world. The pharaoh also had to keep other nations from interfering with its territorial right, which happened to be rather extensive. Each pharaoh also felt pressure to equal or surpass the deeds of his predecessor in service to the gods and the benefit of Egypt. Thus each had to extend the boundaries of the empire, bring foreign spoils back to Egypt, and make sure that everyone understood the extent of his deeds. As descendants of the gods themselves, the pharaohs had divine mandate to rule and conquer, and their divine origin gave them supernatural power to inspire fear and awe in their enemies on the battlefield. Other ancient Near Eastern kingdoms, including Israel, shared in these concepts to some degree. Although Israel's kings were not gods, they had been chosen by Yahweh to conquer and rule other nations in the divinely established order (see Psalm 2, as well as "Role of King" in chapter 2).

The pharaoh's service to the gods was part of a reciprocal relationship between royalty and deity. Egypt's chief gods blessed the different pharaohs, promising them strength, valor, protection, and victory over all enemies. The gods promised to bind foreign adversaries and establish fear of the king's glory in all lands. In return, the pharaoh pledged fidelity to the gods and promised to grant justice, protect the people, and enrich Egypt with temples and proper worship.⁴⁸

*Role of
the Gods*

Egypt's gods regularly promised Egypt success in battle and commissioned war in order to punish the crimes of Egypt's enemies. Records tell of the pharaoh consulting his god in the temple the morning after receiving report of revolt in some land. There, the god gave an oracle of success, apparently through a priest (compare Judah's King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah in 2 Kings 19:1–7). After the army had assembled and was ready to depart, it left via the temple where the gods came out to meet the king (perhaps through the priests bearing the god's image) and prepare him for battle. With assurance of divine aid, victory was a foregone conclusion.⁴⁹

The pharaoh could then proceed under the god's protection, often portrayed in the reliefs through imagery and/or text. The god's presence and protection might be symbolized with the actual standard of the god, as described earlier (Fig. 3.8), or simply through imagery, as with the picture of Horus over the pharaoh's head (Fig. 3.11). Scribes wrote about divine protection and aid as well. An inscription above Ramesses III before his battle with the Libyans promises, "Utterance of Amon-Re, king of gods: 'Lo, I am before thee, my son . . . I will open (for) thee the ways of the land of Temeh (Libya). I will trample them before thy horses.'⁵⁰ Divine aid

might manifest in some supernatural way, like a celestial event. Thutmose III mentions a miraculous (shooting?) star that spooked the horses, terrified the enemy, and led to a great victory for Egypt.⁵¹ Compare the biblical story of Israel's God giving victory through a hailstorm and a supernaturally long day in Joshua 10:1–15.

After the subsequent victory won with the god's aid, the pharaoh would return to the temple to give thanks and to present captives and plunder to the god as an offering. Thus the pharaoh and his god(s) worked in concert to protect and bless Egypt through military victory. Other ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Israel, believed and acted in a similar fashion.



Fig. 3.11 – Pharaoh with protecting god
Thutmose IV and Horus

NOTES

¹ Date per Wilson, "Asiatic Campaigns," 236, n. 35; Nelson has May 15, 1479 (*The Battle of Megiddo*, 1). For accounts and commentaries on the Battle of Megiddo, see Nelson (dated but still helpful with photos and maps); Wilson, "Asiatic Campaigns"; Faulkner, "Battle of Megiddo," Lichtheim, "First Campaign"; and Hoffmeier, "Annals of Thutmose III."

² Egyptian texts mention runners along with chariots multiple times, as does the Bible (1 Sam. 8:11; 2 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kings 1:5), and some reliefs appear to show runners with chariots. Just how foot soldiers could operate in support of the much faster chariots is problematic.

³ For lengths and rates of march, see Wilson, “Asiatic Campaigns,” 235, n. 16, 18; as well as the discussion in Hans Goedicke, *The Battle of Megiddo* (Baltimore: Halgo, 2000), 22–23.

⁴ Translation taken from Hoffmeier, “Annals of Thutmose III,” 9. Nelson describes the center pass as “merely a rough mule-path” from his visits in 1909 and 1912 (*Battle of Megiddo*, 12. See his Views III and IV for nice photographs of the time). When this author first traversed the pass in 1981, it had a narrow two-lane highway, with tank barricades sitting to the side of the road at one point.

⁵ The quality and quantity of the Canaanites’ (and Syrians’) armor is uncertain, though the list of plunder from the end of the campaign gives some indication. It lists 924 chariots, 502 bows, and 202 coats of mail taken. If one can assume that the Canaanite chariots each carried a warrior armed with bow and arrow, the number of bows suggests that perhaps only up to half of the Canaanite chariot-warriors were captured (bows from archers in the infantry may also have been taken). The number of coats of mail suggests that only a fraction of the chariot-warriors wore scale armor, and perhaps none of the chariot drivers. If the Canaanite chariot-warriors did not have scale armor, they may well have worn suits made from just leather, which was less expensive and less effective than suits of leather covered with overlaying bronze scales. Also possible is that many Canaanite charioteers escaped the battlefield altogether or found refuge in Megiddo, where they were able to hide their armor and weapons before the city surrendered.

⁶ Compare Napoleon Bonaparte’s comment, “A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon.”

⁷ Nelson comments, “The importance of the fall of Megiddo cannot be overestimated. It crushed once for all the rebellion . . . It was a fitting introduction to the wars of the greatest conqueror the world had then seen. . . . It is the first battle in history in which we can in any measure study the disposition of troops and as such forms the starting point for the history of military science” (*Battle of Megiddo*, 63).

* Dates for Egyptian history and spelling of pharaohs' names taken from K. A. Kitchen, "Egypt, History of (Chronology)," *ABD* 2:321–31.

⁹ To help keep out the unwanted nomads, Egypt established forts, dug a seventy-meter-wide canal, and made preemptive military strikes against the "sand-dwellers." James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (NY: Oxford, 1997), 56–68; quote on 58–59.

¹⁰ For helpful general descriptions of the Egyptian military during the Old and Middle Kingdoms, see Faulkner, "Egyptian Military Organization," 32–41; Schulman, "Military Organization in Pharaonic Egypt," 289–90; and William C. Hayes, "Egypt: Internal Affairs from Tuthmosis I to the Death of Amenophis III," in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (3d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 2:313. For the various aspects of the military during the New Kingdom, see Faulkner, 41–47; Schulman, 290–300; and Hayes, 2:363–72.

¹¹ Schulman, *MRTO*, § 114. Also see 229 for subsequent reference to 10% draft, as well as 100, 112.

¹² For induction process, see Harold. H. Nelson, "The Naval Battle Pictured at Medinet Habu," *JNES* 2, no. 1 (1943): 40; and Hayes, "Egypt: Internal Affairs," 365. For descriptions of the harsh conditions, see Schulman, *MRTO*, § 94, 99, 113, 124, 126, 128, 137. *MRTO* § 123 reads in part, "The infantryman is brought as a child . . . He is beaten with exertions. He awakes in the morning to receive beatings until he is split open with wounds. . . . A painful blow . . . a doubling blow . . . a turning upside-down blow . . . a falling-down blow. . . . He is pummeled with beatings . . ." In addition, the very interesting picture of Ramesses III's camp at Kadesh shows perhaps nineteen Egyptian soldiers with rods apparently beating either fellow Egyptians, enemy Hittites, or a donkey (or child). James H. Breasted, *The Battle of Kadesh: A Study in the Earliest Known Military Strategy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1903), pl. 1; for a smaller, colored version, see Yadin, *AWBL*, 1:236–37.

¹³ Hayes, "Egypt: Internal Affairs," 366–67, 371.

¹⁴ Breasted, *ARE*, 3: § 56; 4: § 410; Schulman, *MRTO*, § 124, 129, 159, 196, 235.

¹⁵ Harold H. Nelson, *Medinet Habu Reports I: The Epigraphic Survey 1928–31* (Oriental Institute Communications, No. 10; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 34.

¹⁶ Schulman, *MRTO*, § 236, 293–303.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, § 151, 213, 231.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, § 29, 168; Faulkner, “Egyptian Military Organization,” 43–45.

¹⁹ Schulman, *MRTO*, § 142, 149, 240. Also see Seevers, “Practice of Ancient Near Eastern Warfare,” pp. 20–22.

²⁰ Schulman, *MRTO*, § 237–38, 305–72, 400–25, 491–510, pp. 82–86; Hayes, “Egypt: Internal Affairs,” 364–65.

²¹ The Hammamat Stele lists twenty scribes and twenty quartermasters for a division of 5000, apparently indicating one each per company of 250. See Schulman, *MRTO*, § 380, 442–71, pp. 82–86.

²² R. O. Faulkner, “Egyptian Military Standards,” *JEA* 27 (1941): 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, § 148, 152; Faulkner, “Egyptian Military Standards,” 17–18.

²⁴ Schulman, *MRTO*, § 276–92.

²⁵ Faulkner, “Egyptian Military Organization,” 43; Schulman, *MRTO*, § 162, 281, 433–41, 477–90.

²⁶ Schulman, *MRTO*, § 265, 275, 286–87.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, § 242–58; Schulman, “Military Organization in Pharaonic Egypt,” 290.

²⁸ See Schulman, *MRTO*, § 441 and especially § 240, which notes a “charioteer of the Residence” and fifty charioteers in a work detail, suggesting fifty chariots in a squadron. See also Schulman, “The Egyptian Chariotry: a Reexamination,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 2 (1963), 83–84, esp. n. 44. Faulkner (“Egyptian Military Organization,” 43) agrees with this number.

²⁹ For a discussion of the title “Overseer of Horses” reflecting the growing importance of the chariot corps during the 18th Dynasty, see Charles Aling, “The Title ‘Overseer of Horses’ in the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty,” *NEASB* 38 (1993): 53–60.

³⁰ Schulman, *MRTO*, ¶ 135, 373–79, 382, 390–99, 430, 479–490; also Schulman, “The Egyptian Chariotry: a Reexamination,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 2 (1963), 82.

³¹ See, for example, William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992), EA 1:2–3; 2:4–5; 3:1–3.

³² Schulman, *MRTO*, ¶ 96.

³³ Texts describing the Egyptian expulsion of the Hyksos at the end of the Second Intermediate Period give some indications of ships being used for military activity. See Pritchard, *ANET*, 232–34.

³⁴ Lichtheim, *AEL*, 2:13–14; Schulman, *MRTO*, ¶ 87–88, 95–97.

³⁵ Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, *The Navy of the Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasty* (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska, 1946), 34, 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–6, 43–44.

³⁷ S. R. K. Glanville, “Records of a Royal Dockyard of the Time of Tuthmosis III: Papyrus British Museum 10056: Part 1,” *ZÄS* 66 (1931): 105–20. “Part 2: Commentary,” *ZÄS* 68 (1932): 7–41.

³⁸ Säve-Söderbergh, *The Navy*, 16, 44–53; Hayes, “Egypt: Internal Affairs,” 367–68; R. O. Faulkner, “Egyptian Seagoing Ships,” *JEA* 26 (1940): 7–9.

³⁹ Harold H. Nelson, “The Naval Battle Pictured at Medinet Habu,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2 (1943): 42–55; Faulkner, “Egyptian Seagoing Ships,” 9.

⁴⁰ Lichtheim, *AEL*, 2:172.

⁴¹ Hayes, “Egypt: Internal Affairs,” 2:363–64, 371.

⁴² Two sources seem to indicate 5000 soldiers per division. The Hammamat Stele (12th century) lists a work detail including 5000 soldiers (Schulman, *MRTO*, ¶ 240), and a scribe's logistical problem (late 13th century), possibly hypothetical, involves the parts of a division that total 5000 troops (*MRTO*, ¶ 87). Both sources are late but consistent, and square with much of the other available evidence.

⁴³ The text gives 2,500 Hittite chariots and later mentions another(?) 1,000 for an apparent total of 3,500. Schulman dismisses the number of even 2,500 Hittite chariots as “rhetorical hyperbole” since it implies a total of 7,500–10,000 horses (two to pull, plus one or two in reserve for each chariot), “and this would have presented insurmountable logistical problems, particularly in the matter of forage” (“Military Organization in Pharaonic Egypt”, 297). However, the similar numbers of chariots by arguably lesser coalitions, discussed earlier, argue against such a position.

⁴⁴ Breasted, *ARE* 3: ¶ 571, 588–89; 4:¶ 52, 54, 83.

⁴⁵ Nelson, *Battle of Megiddo*, 6.

⁴⁶ Pritchard, *ANET*, 243–44, 247.

⁴⁷ Quote from Pritchard, *ANET*, 246. For Ramses at Kadesh, see *COS* 2:36. Story of Amenhotep II in Pritchard, *ANET*, 247.

⁴⁸ Pritchard, *ANET*, 23, 240, 246, 247, 373–75, 377.

⁴⁹ Breasted, *ARE* 2: ¶ 823, 119; Nelson, *Medinet Habu Reports I*, 14.

⁵⁰ Breasted, *ARE* 4: ¶ 49.

⁵¹ *COS*, 2:14.

EGYPT: ARMIES OF THE PHARAOHS—PART 2

4

WEAPONS

Although the Egyptians ascribed their victories to divine aid, they accomplished them through physical means that included weaponry. The military success during the New Kingdom was due, at least in part, to advances in Egyptian weaponry, vastly improved over what the Egyptians had used before the time of the Hyksos. During the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the Egyptians had relied on maces (clubs with heavy stone balls at the end, used to crush an opponent—see Fig. 3.3), spears, battle-axes with broad blades, simple bows made from a single long piece of wood, and, for defense, leather-covered wooden shields. Such weaponry had proven effective against contemporary enemies who, like themselves, had little or no armor. But the subsequent losses to the Hyksos apparently convinced the Egyptians that they needed to upgrade their weaponry.¹ Beginning in the 18th Dynasty, they added to their weaponry implements such as composite bows, chariots, armor-penetrating axes (Fig. 4.1—lower right), helmets, and eventually metal body armor.

Such military implements can be classified as either offensive weapons, like swords, bows, and chariots, or defensive equipment, like shields and armor. Offensive weapons might be further broken down into short-range weapons used for hand-to-hand fighting, medium-range weapons thrown a moderate distance, and long-range weapons that shot projectiles a long distance. Each will be discussed in turn.

SHORT-RANGE WEAPONS

Mace Infantrymen and others who fought hand-to-hand needed weapons like the mace that would function well at close range. The mace had long been a popular close-range weapon and even came to represent pharaonic authority, with the pharaoh often pictured striking his enemies with a mace (Fig. 3.3). But by the time of the New Kingdom, it had largely gone out of use, perhaps due to the increased use of helmets. However, some soldiers did continue fighting with maces (see soldier on bow of ship in Fig. 3.10), and Pharaoh Amenhotep II used one to slay seven enemy princes as late as the mid-15th century.²

*Spear,
Battle-axe* Reliefs suggest that the spear and battle-axe may have become the most popular short-range weapons by the time of the New Kingdom. Similar to other contemporary armies, Egyptian infantrymen are frequently pictured with shields and spears or battle-axes (Figs. 3.2 and 3.7). They protected themselves with shields and used long thrusting spears or sharp penetrating axes to attack their opponents. Earlier battle-axes tended to have broader blades that could effectively cut unprotected or lightly protected opponents (Fig. 4.1—top). As time went on and armies began to use more and heavier defensive equipment like leather and later scaled armor, the blades of the battle-axes got narrower and longer (Fig. 4.1—bottom, as well as 3.7) to produce a more powerful force that could penetrate the protective gear.

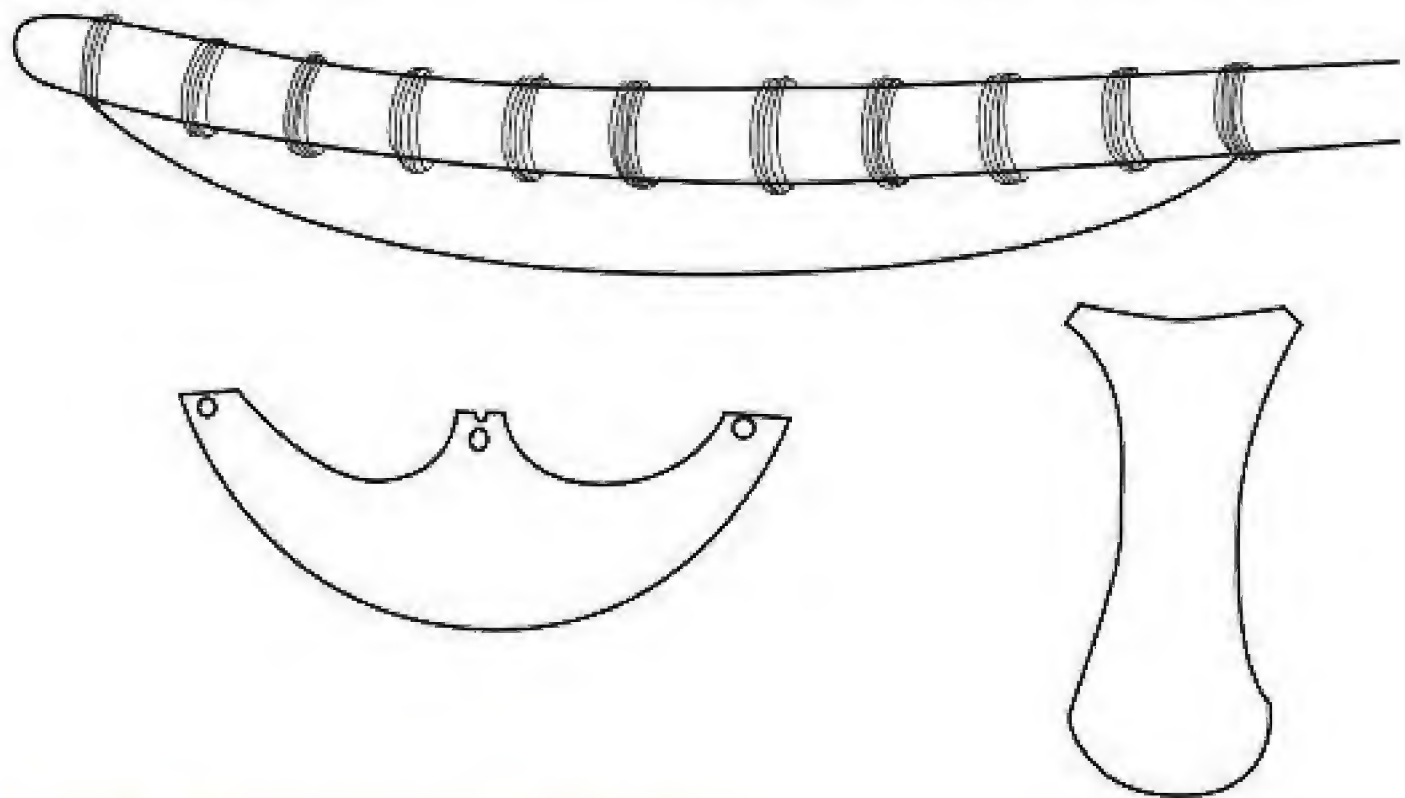


Fig. 4.1 – Progression of battle-axes

Oldest on top, with handle. Newest and narrowest on lower right

The sword went through a somewhat similar evolution over time. Earlier on, swords were shaped rather like a harvesting sickle (Fig. 4.2—left) and thus were called “sickle-swords.” Unlike harvesting sickles with the sharp edge on the inside for cutting grain, sickle-swords had their sharp edge on the outside for slashing an opponent. The biblical expression of striking “with the edge of the sword” (Josh. 6:21, ESV; etc.) probably comes from the use of this type of sword. Sickle-swords started with a relatively long shaft and shorter cutting blade but changed to a much shorter shaft and a relatively long cutting blade (Fig. 4.2—left). Reliefs during the New Kingdom often portray the pharaoh with a sickle-sword, suggesting that it had replaced the mace as the pharaoh’s weapon of authority. Toward the end of the New Kingdom, Egyptians began using straight, tapered swords as well (Fig. 4.2, 4.3, 4.11—on ladder). The straight swords first appear in reliefs in the hands of Sea Peoples (Fig. 5.11), suggesting that the Philistines and related peoples may well have brought this design to the region.³

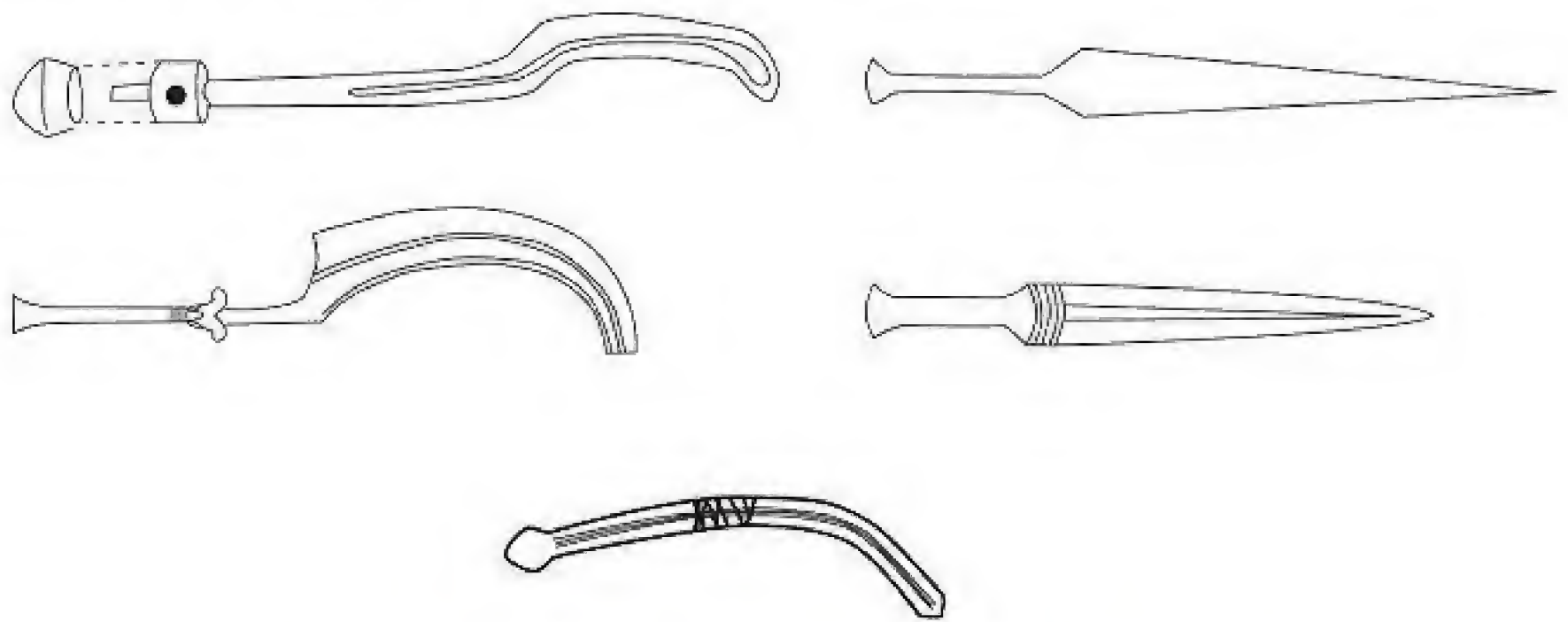


Fig. 4.2 – Sickle swords (left), straight swords (right), throw-stick (bottom)

The Egyptians also used a bronze metal rod as a short-range weapon, apparently for beating their enemies in combat as well as beating their own troops for discipline, as discussed earlier (see Fig. 4.3 and soldier just behind the mast in 3.10). Approximately one inch in diameter and three to four feet long, the rod appears as a common Egyptian instrument in reliefs of this period. It had a projection near the base to protect the combatant’s fingers (as in Fig. 3.10), but users are also shown grasping the rod

and in warfare more often during the Middle Kingdom, though its use continued during the New Kingdom.⁵

LONG-RANGE WEAPONS

As with most other armies of the period, the Egyptians used the composite bow as their long-range weapon of choice. Earlier Egyptians had used the simple bow, which was made from a single piece of curved or double-curved wood, cut rather long to supply as much force as possible (Fig. 4.4—left). By the time of the New Kingdom, the Egyptians had adopted the composite bow from the Hyksos.⁶ The composite bow was shorter but much more powerful (Fig. 4.4—right), with an effective range of at least 175 yards.⁷ It was made by gluing together multiple pieces of various woods, horn, bark, and tendon.⁸ Archers and chariot-warriors relied on this powerful but somewhat delicate weapon. Reliefs often portray bows carried in bow cases, suggesting that they needed to be protected from elements such as moisture. Reliefs of pharaohs sometimes depict them shooting composite bows, a further reflection of the weapon's importance.

Bow

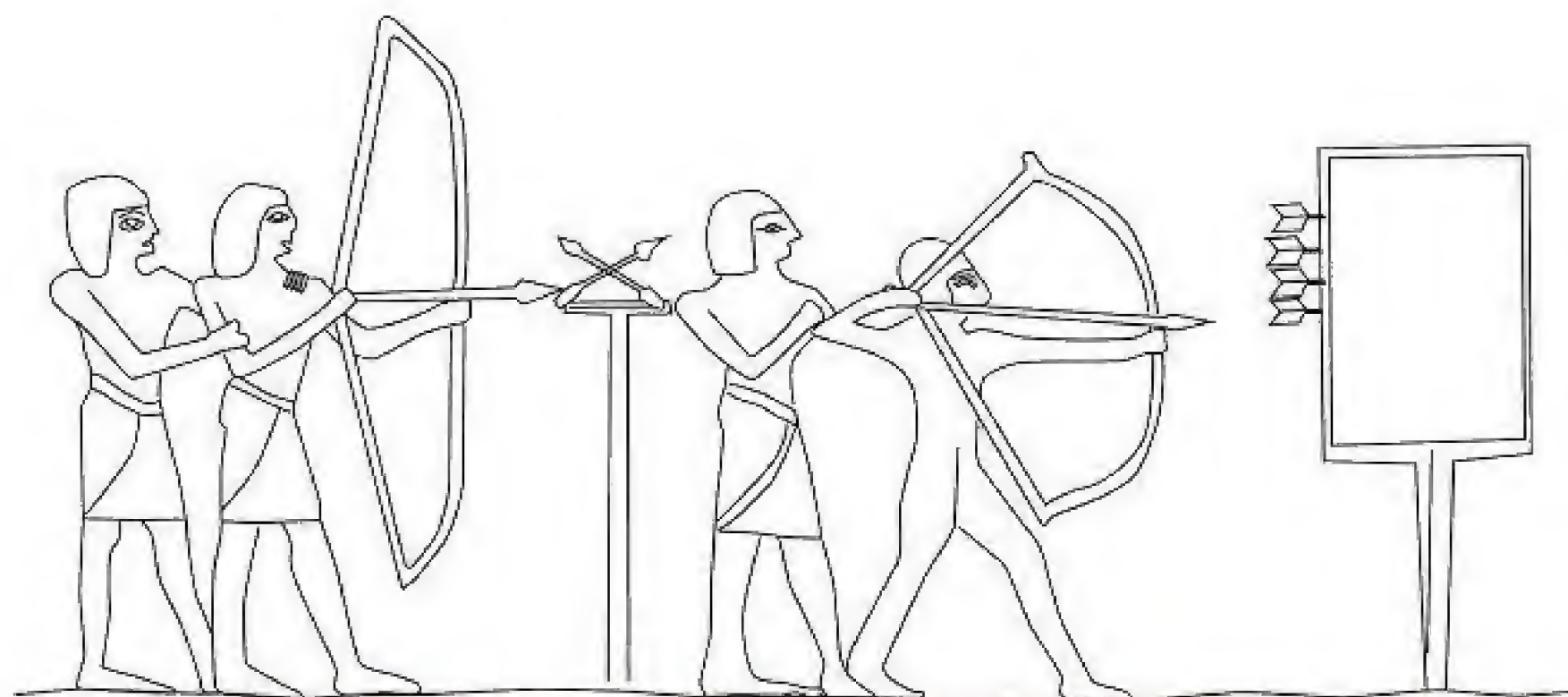


Fig. 4.4 – Archers training with simple (left) and composite (right) bows

The Egyptians also used, although perhaps only sparingly, the sling as a long-range weapon. The design of the woven Egyptian sling in Fig. 4.5⁹ closely resembles slings still produced in the Middle East. Egyptians used the sling as a weapon during the New Kingdom, but apparently

Sling

not as much as other ancient Near Eastern nations described later, even though the sling's effective range exceeded that of the bow.¹⁰ In the New Kingdom reliefs, one finds Egyptian slingers only in the crows' nests of the ships in the naval battle against the Sea Peoples (Figs. 3.10, 4.10). The Egyptian slinger in Fig. 3.10 appears to whirl his weapon horizontally over his head, in contrast to the method used by Assyrian slingers discussed in chapter 7.

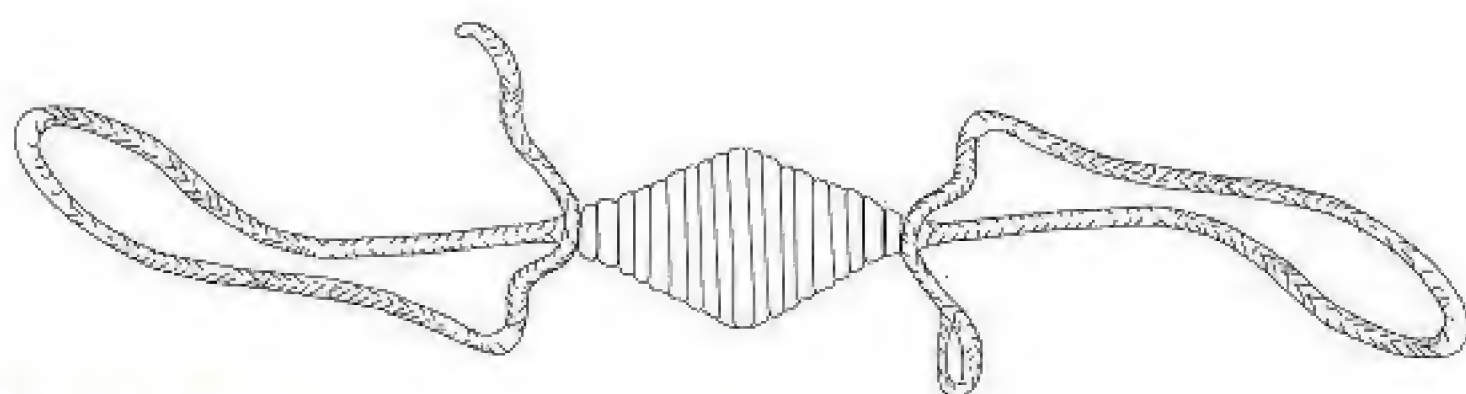


Fig. 4.5 – Sling

DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT

Along with offensive weaponry, the Egyptians also equipped their soldiers with defensive implements—helmets, shields, and, increasingly throughout the New Kingdom, scale armor.

Helmets Helmets of fabric, leather, or metal (Fig. 4.6) apparently came into use in the Egyptian military only during the New Kingdom. Officers and royalty first wore helmets, but by the second half of this period, common soldiers had them as well.¹¹ Helmets helped protect soldiers from blows to the skull, the effects of which the Egyptian physicians developed great skill in treating.¹²

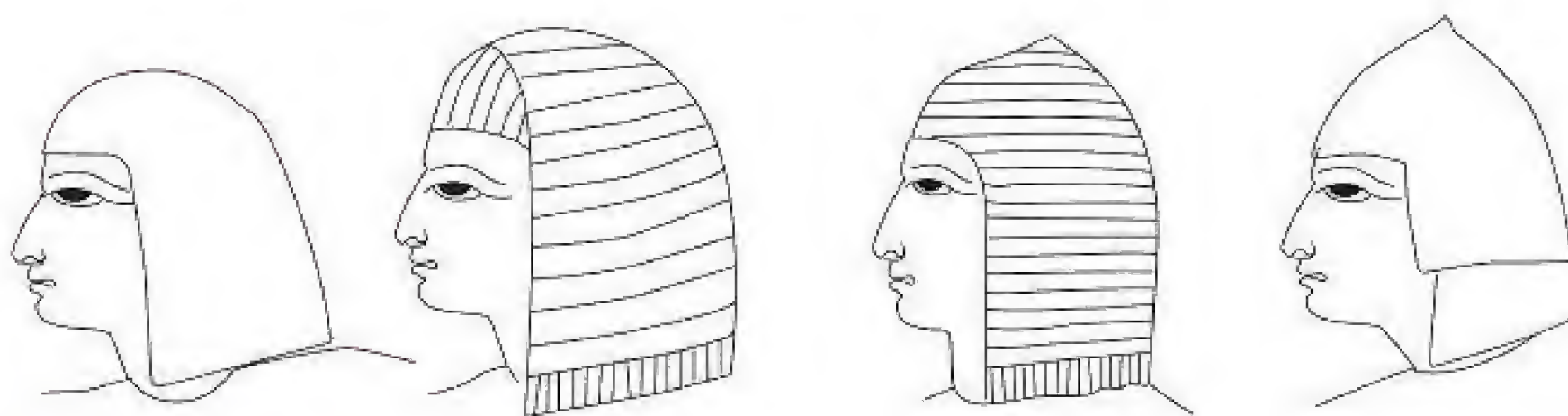


Fig. 4.6 – Various styles of helmets

Arguably the most obvious defensive items, shields were made of wood covered with leather. Their shapes varied over time, and different shapes sometimes appear in the same reliefs. Most were rounded on top and tapered to a flat bottom (Figs. 3.2, 3.4, 3.7, 4.3), but the Sea Peoples used smaller round shields (Figs. 3.5—top left, 5.6). As one can see in Fig. 3.2, heavy infantry used large shields to protect most of their bodies, while the charioteers' shields were smaller. Some shields had a hole in the middle (Figs. 3.4—shown blocked, 3.7, 4.3), apparently for better visibility. Soldiers occasionally slung their shields over their backs when they needed both hands free for tasks like attacking a city gate or climbing a scaling ladder (Fig. 4.11).

Shields

As noted earlier, the Egyptians began to use body armor in various forms during the New Kingdom, though just when that began is not clear.¹³ Garments of linen or leather offered some protection, but armor with added metal scales or metal strips sewn on top of leather or cloth were most effective (Fig. 4.7). Prior to c. 1200 BC, the use of such body armor seems limited to a relatively small part of the military (pharaohs and perhaps charioteers), but afterward more and more infantry used it as well. By the time of the naval battle in 1179 BC, the majority of both the Egyptians and Sea Peoples appear to wear armor consisting of waist-length corselets with strips of metal as well as leather skirts that reached to mid-thigh (Fig. 3.10).¹⁴

Armor

CHARIOTS

Along with weapons and defensive equipment, the army of New Kingdom Egypt also put great effort and expense into the construction and maintenance of horse-drawn chariots, the greatest military implement of the time. Egyptian texts of the early 16th century refer to chariots of the Hyksos, who may well have used the chariot to help conquer Egypt. After the Hyksos period, the Egyptians quickly adopted it as well, and by the mid-15th century, the chariot played a major role in military activities in

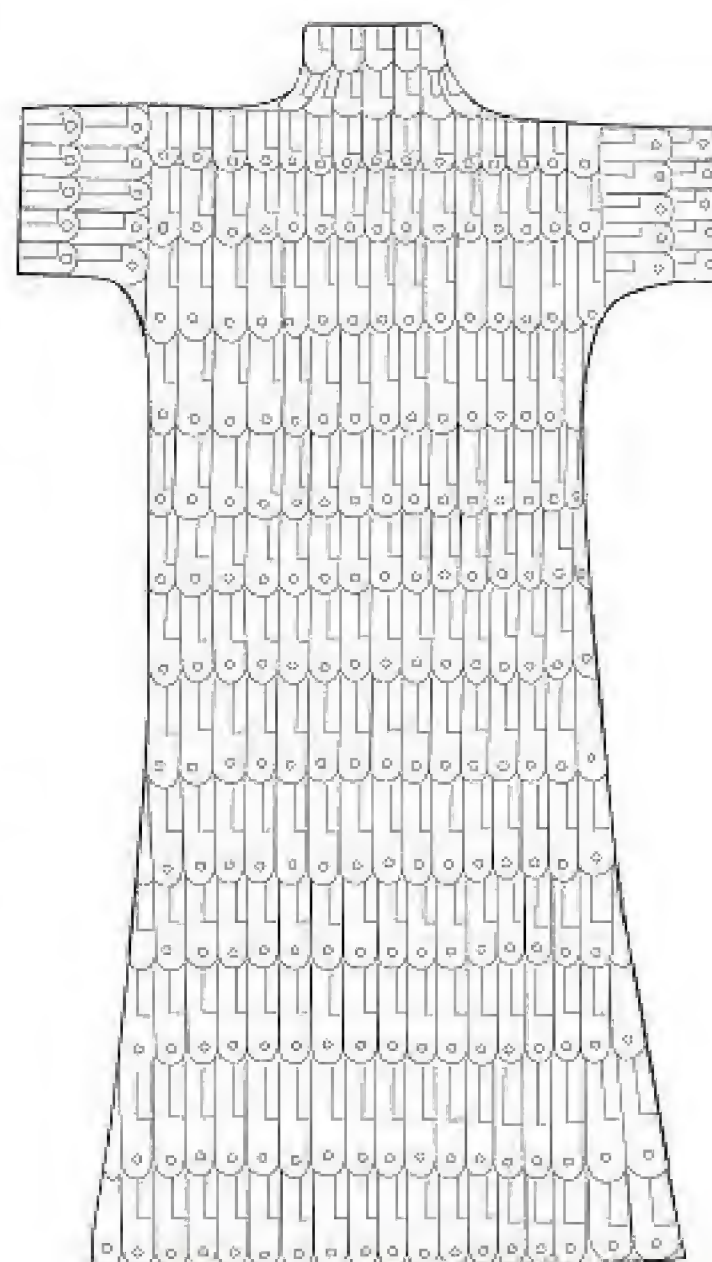


Fig. 4.7 – Suit of scale armor
from tomb of Ramesses III

Egypt and throughout the Levant. The Old Testament includes more than 170 references to the chariot, reflecting its importance in Israelite society (note, for example, 1 Sam. 8:11). Texts and reliefs also show pharaohs and other rulers using chariots for ceremonial and hunting purposes.

Pictorial evidence from numerous reliefs plus several actual chariots from Egyptian tombs present a reasonably clear picture of how these war machines were made (Fig. 4.8).¹⁵ In contrast to wheeled wagons used earlier and heavier chariots used later in parts of the ancient Near East, most chariots during this period were light vehicles built to carry two men. They were made mostly of bent hardwood and leather, with a few metal parts and wrappings of birch bark to repel moisture. Earlier Egyptian chariots tended to have wheels with four spokes, and some later chariots had eight spokes, but the majority of the Egyptian chariots during the height of the New Kingdom had wheels with six spokes, each approximately three feet in diameter.¹⁶ A long axle connected the wheels, giving the chariots a wide, stable wheel-base (c. five to six feet). The axle was attached to the rear of the chariot body to allow for maximum speed, stability, and maneuverability.

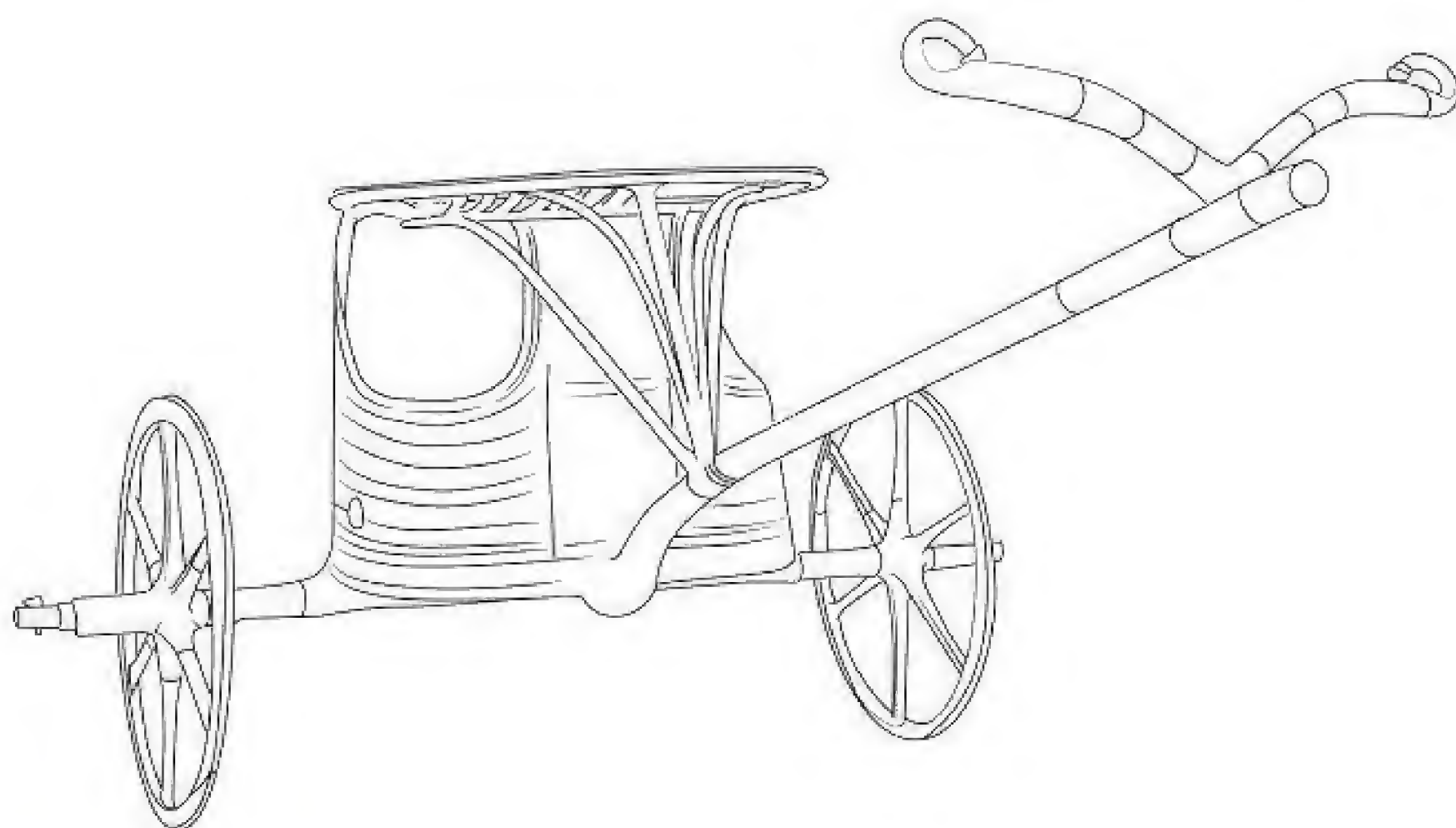


Fig. 4.8 – Chariot with six-spoked wheels
from tomb of Tutankhamun

The chariot bodies formed a wide and shallow D-shape (c. 3.3 x 1.5 feet), with the round end to the front, allowing room for a driver and a warrior. The frame was again made from bent wood, filled with thigh-high siding of dressed leather or very thin wood extending around the front, sides, and sometimes halfway across the back. The floor was woven from rawhide thongs that helped hold the frame together and provide shock absorption for the riders. Several other war implements would have been attached to the body—a bow case was mounted diagonally and opened toward the front of the chariot, and at least one quiver for arrows and javelins pointed toward the rear.

A pole connected the chariot body to the two horses that pulled it. The long (8–8.5 foot) pole curved into a shallow S-shape was lashed to the underside of the body and reached forward to a yoke approximately three feet long. From the yoke hung Y-shaped saddles (not pictured) that lay across the shoulders of the horses. The driver controlled the horses with blinkers and reins that attached to bitted bridles or perhaps bands around the horses' noses.

The Egyptians made their chariots from elm and tamarisk wood. The tamarisk grows in semi-arid regions around the Mediterranean and thus was native to Egypt. The elm, by contrast, had to be imported from perhaps as far away as Asia Minor, showing the lengths the Egyptians would go to obtain the materials to make their chariots or perhaps even the complete chariots themselves. The wood had to be steamed and heat-bent, and perhaps also trained to grow in the desired shapes as much as possible. Scenes of chariot workshops found in tombs illustrate some of the splitting, shaping, and bending of wood necessary to make chariots. Note in Fig. 4.9 the processes and chariot parts, as well as other items also made from wood and leather, including shields, quivers, and bow cases.¹⁷

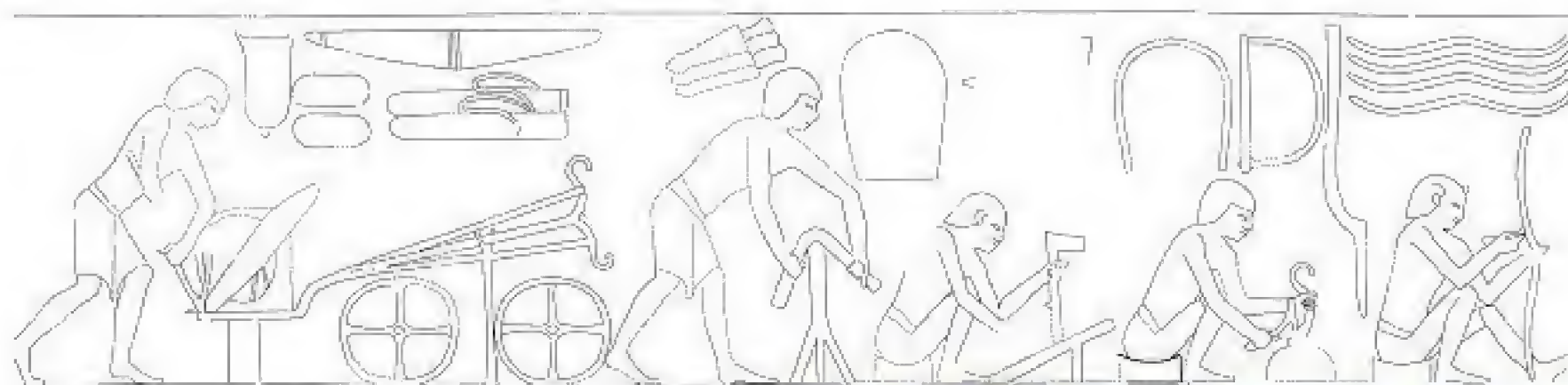


Fig. 4.9 – Tomb painting of chariot workshop
Workers produce chariots and other items of wood and leather

TACTICS

The final section of this chapter will describe the strategy and tactics that the Egyptians used during the period of the New Kingdom. What were their motivations for fighting? What strategies did they use for individual battles as well as the overall campaigns that made Egypt the greatest power of the day? What did the Egyptians do before, during, and after their battles? As before, the available information is rarely complete, but it helps paint an interesting picture nonetheless.

MOTIVATION

The Egyptians undoubtedly had numerous and complex reasons for going to war. In the records of Thutmose III's first campaign, he lists several: "to kill the treacherous (rebellious) ones . . . and to give things to those who were loyal . . ." ". . . to extend the frontiers of Egypt according to the command of his father, Amon-Re . . . that he should capture (plunder)."¹⁸ Such statements provide theological support for actions that clearly served the pharaoh's self-interests as well. The reader is hard pressed to find examples of the pharaoh actually giving "things to those who were loyal," but the records often describe how he captured plunder to enrich himself and his nation.

As described earlier, the pharaoh was responsible to maintain order and return favors to the gods who supported him. The pharaoh needed to put down rebellions by those whom Egypt had the right to rule—which happened to be quite numerous. As the size of the empire grew throughout the New Kingdom, the opportunities for rebellion and the need to subdue them grew as well.

The pharaoh acted at the command and with the help of his gods, and in response he needed to build the gods' temples and enrich them with foreign plunder. For example, Thutmose II defended his rise to the throne by stating that Re had established him "that I might supply with food his altars upon earth; that I might make to flourish for him the sacred slaughtering-block with great slaughters in his temple, consisting of oxen and calves without limit . . . fill(ing) for him his granaries with barley and spelt without limit."¹⁹ By comparison, note King Solomon's immense wealth, which resulted from ruling the vast Israelite empire that his father had secured (1 Kings 4:21–28), and how Solomon then used a portion of those resources to build the temple for his God (1 Kings 5–6).

STRATEGY

The records of several pharaohs demonstrate how they accomplished their goals by using carefully planned military strategies that stretched over many years and multiple campaigns. Thutmose III extended the Egyptian empire northward all the way to the Euphrates River in systematic, logical fashion. In his first campaign, Thutmose defeated the Canaanite coalition at Megiddo, reestablishing Egyptian authority in Canaan and Syria. In each subsequent year, he would travel farther north, consolidating earlier conquests and collecting tribute. He also established Egyptian garrisons at key points, ordering the local subjects to fill them with provisions for future operations. An earlier section described how he used ships as part of this strategy. The ships transported troops and supplies to the Phoenician coast in preparation for operations farther inland and then brought troops and plunder back to Egypt. Thutmose III's strategy and success over seventeen major campaigns helped make him arguably the most successful military leader of ancient Egypt.

More than two centuries later, Seti I followed a similar strategy, as did Ramesses II after him. Each moved north to regain control of the Phoenician coast, probably lost in earlier revolts. They then used ships to move men and supplies into position for further advances.

The Egyptian army typically set out on these campaigns during the spring and continued them during the dry summer months when roads were passable and food was available. Since the spring grain harvest occurred earlier in Egypt than in Canaan, the Egyptians would leave just after the Egyptian harvest and just before the harvest farther north so they could take what they needed as they passed through different areas.

*Season
for War*

The more complete record of Thutmose III's first campaign gives some of the best information about the dates and time involved. The Egyptian army left the frontier station of Tjaru on April 19 and returned to the capital at Thebes to celebrate on October 11. During those nearly six months, they approached and fought the battle at Megiddo, besieged and captured the city (during which time they foraged, then harvested the grain around the city), marched an additional seventy-five miles north, captured three cities, built a fortress, returned to the Nile delta, and voyaged upstream to Thebes.²⁰

Several campaigns of other pharaohs followed similar patterns. Amenhotep II and Ramesses II both left Egypt in April or May on at least some of their campaigns to the north.²¹ Amenhotep fought a successful battle in northern Palestine in May, crossed the Orontes River on May 12, and continued north. The records do not tell when he returned to Egypt.

Other ancient Near Eastern nations seem to follow this approximate schedule as well. The records of Merenptah show that Libya attacked Egypt in late March. In response, Merenptah gathered his forces and responded in mid-April.²² Likewise, King David ordered an attack on Rabbah of Ammon “in the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle.” (2 Sam. 11:1, ESV). See also 1 Kings 20:22, 26, where the same Hebrew expression describes the Aramean king going to war at that same time of year.

The March

When the Egyptians began their campaigns, they often assembled and departed from the central military headquarters called the “Broad Hall (of the Palace).” At this location, officers distributed weapons and supplies from a central depot and issued battle orders. Once everything was ready, a standard-bearer and trumpeter led the troops out while the king reviewed the army from a palace balcony.²³ Compare David reviewing the Israelite troops from the city gate as they departed to put down Absalom’s rebellion in 2 Sam. 18:1–5.

The Egyptian army marched in columns, divided into their respective divisions. The account of the Battle of Kadesh notes that Ramesses II and his attendants led the march, followed closely by the first division. The other three divisions followed in order, separated by a distance of approximately 1.5 miles at one point. Such spacing lessened the chance that an enemy’s surprise attack could destroy the whole army, but it also helped ensure that aid would not be too far away for any who might be caught off guard.²⁴

Egypt’s army could march approximately twelve to fifteen miles per day, though again, the evidence is scanty. Thutmose III and his forces apparently traveled about fifteen miles per day for much of their advance toward Megiddo, as noted earlier. Similarly, Ramses II and his troops averaged about thirteen miles per day when approaching Kadesh.²⁵

Soldiers on these marches often endured great hardship because of the loads they bore and the conditions in which they found themselves. Each soldier carried his weapons as well as a knapsack, supplies, garments, and staff or club. Scribal satires describe the plight of the common soldier—marching through the desert to Canaan, carrying food and water on his

back like a donkey, drinking poor water and eating inferior food that were often in short supply, and marching long days with little or no rest. Even when the soldier could stop marching, he often had to stand guard. Secondary expeditions took some of the soldiers away from the protection of the main body. When the time came for entering battle, the soldier might be too exhausted, ill, or frightened to perform well.²⁶ Many died, were placed in a big sack, and were buried in a strange land, far from home and family.

If all went well during the day's march, the soldier had to help set up camp for the night and fortify it against possible enemy attack. Reliefs show Egyptian camps as rectangular enclosures, barricaded by shields. The royal tent occupied the center and was surrounded by smaller tents of the officers. Men cared for their equipment and animals. Craftsmen brought along portable workshops to service the equipment, especially the chariots.²⁷

As mentioned earlier, Egyptian soldiers often did not enjoy good food while on campaign, especially compared with what they received back in their homeland. While stationed in garrison or on home work details, the soldier might get ground grain, bread, vegetables, meat, fowl, wine, oil, etc. On the march, however, he typically received bread and water, and had to supplement by foraging. Marching across the desert, he obtained water at fortified water stations along the road. Elsewhere, water was more plentiful, but often of poor quality.²⁸

*Food and
Logistics*

Food shortages were a constant problem. The army supplied some food, carried by pack animals or ox-drawn carts. Most came from the regions through which the army passed. Local rulers under Egyptian authority were responsible to lay up provisions in Egyptian garrisons. In hostile territory, the army took what it needed by force. Records often state that “(His majesty) arrived at (name of city), overthrew it, cut down its groves, harvested its grain.” Nonetheless, scribal satires often describe the woes of the hungry soldiers and the challenges of trying to satisfy hungry troops with inadequate supplies.²⁹

As mentioned above, the Egyptian army used animals and carts to haul supplies including food, water, spare weapons, etc. In earlier times they had used donkeys, but by the time of the 18th Dynasty, they added mules, and later, ox-drawn carts as well. Thutmose III even used ox-carts to carry boats inland from Byblos on the Mediterranean coast to the Euphrates River so his troops would be able to cross the Euphrates.

Such major military endeavors required an effective system of intelligence and communication. Mounted scouts were attached to units of chariotry under the “commander of horsemen,” and sometimes appear in reliefs or on tombs. They supplied information about enemy troops (numbers of infantry and chariots, weapons, location, preparedness, and members of coalitions) as well as the terrain up ahead. Egyptian intelligence, for example, apparently advised Thutmose III that the Canaanite forces were not guarding the narrow central pass to Megiddo, allowing him to choose that route.³⁰

The absence of proper intelligence could leave the army in serious trouble, as happened to Ramesses II at Kadesh. There, the Hittite king sent bedouin agents posing as deserters to purposely be captured by the Egyptians. They told Ramesses that the nearby Hittite army was 120 miles off to the north in order to lure the Egyptians into a trap. Just before the battle, the Egyptians captured two Hittite scouts and beat them with metal rods until they revealed their army’s true location. Shortly thereafter, Hittite chariots attacked Ramesses’ camp, and only his bravery and the opportune arrival of reinforcements averted a disaster.

The pharaohs and their senior officers discussed intelligence and other matters at war councils. The pharaoh chaired these meetings from his “throne of fine gold” that he brought along on the march. Officers could give their advice, but the pharaoh could overrule their recommendations and make the final decision, as Thutmose III did regarding which pass to take to Megiddo.

The Egyptians and others collected information and passed along orders through various forms of communication. As soon as he realized that his division was in trouble, Ramesses II sent messages by horseman and chariot to the trailing two divisions to speed their arrival. In an earlier campaign, the troops of Amenhotep II captured an enemy messenger carrying a letter of clay “at his throat,” apparently a small clay tablet in a pouch hung around his neck.³¹ The Egyptians and other armies of the time undoubtedly utilized other methods of communication as well.

BATTLE TACTICS

As noted earlier, ancient records tell us surprisingly little about the tactics used in battles. From the information they do record, it seems that armies such as Egypt’s used massed infantry armed primarily with spear and shield and arranged in rectangular formations called phalanxes, which

engaged other enemy phalanxes. Infantry served alongside chariots that screened infantry on the march and acted in concert with them during battle. Chariots acted as mobile archery platforms to disrupt enemy formations and engage enemy chariots. Then at the close of battle, chariots would pursue and kill fleeing enemy troops. As the numbers of chariots increased, they likely played a greater and greater role in battles. Later battles seem to have consisted primarily of chariot engagements,³² as at Kadesh.

The records of the battles at Megiddo in 1468 BC and Kadesh in 1275 BC offer the best information about tactics used. This chapter has already described in detail the action at Megiddo and mentioned numerous facets of the battle at Kadesh. The action at Kadesh (Map 3.1) resembled Megiddo in that the pharaoh and the Egyptian army marched north to do battle with a powerful enemy coalition to determine control of a major part of the Levant. During this battle, however, the Egyptians faced the Hittites and their allies from Asia Minor rather than Canaanites and Syrians, and this time Egypt had to overcome an enemy with clear tactical advantage to avoid disastrous defeat.

*Battle at
Kadesh
1275 BC*

As noted earlier, Ramesses II led a force of 20,000 troops to Kadesh and was caught off guard by a Hittite ruse. The Hittite chariotry attacked and thoroughly scattered the second Egyptian division, Re, while it marched northward toward Kadesh. The Hittites then turned to attack Ramesses' lead division of Amon while it was setting up camp. Ramesses' division also scattered, and the Hittite chariotry surrounded Ramesses and his bodyguard. Ramesses quickly mounted his chariot and repeatedly led counterattacks against the enemy, driving it toward the Orontes River. This action left the Egyptian camp abandoned for the Hittites to plunder but also bought the Egyptians more time. Eventually the third division, Ptah, arrived from the south as well as the *na'arun*, mentioned earlier, from the west. The Egyptian troops now had the Hittite chariots caught between their lines, and the Hittites broke and fled to the safety of Kadesh.³³

Despite the Hittites' clear advantage early on, as well as the bravery shown by Ramesses and the opportune arrival of Egyptian reinforcements later on in the battle, the outcome proved inconclusive in many respects. The fourth Egyptian division, Sutekh, could not reach the battlefield in time to take part, and the Hittite king kept his infantry force of 8,000–9,000 troops out of the action as well. Although Ramesses gained a great personal reputation and claimed victory, he took no further action

to engage the Hittites or capture the city. He withdrew from the area immediately following the battle, raising serious questions about his claims of victory. The overall political situation remained largely unchanged, with the Hittites in control of Syria at least as far south as Kadesh.

As was the case with Megiddo, the Egyptian accounts of the battle at Kadesh leave many questions unanswered. How would the Hittites have described the action and results? Are the Egyptian numbers accurate for the enemy troop strength? How many were killed, injured, or taken captive? Casualties must have been heavy on both sides, but the Egyptians give no figures. The Egyptians apparently went into battle with 20,000 infantry in four divisions, but their chariot strength is completely unknown. The records seem to imply that the engagement consisted mostly of chariot battles, though this is uncertain. Since three Egyptian divisions were engaged, their infantry must have participated to some degree, though how much and in what way remains unclear.

*Naval and
Land Battles
with Sea
Peoples
1179 BC*

The only known naval battle from this period occurred in the previously mentioned encounter between the Egyptians under Ramesses III and a coalition of enemy invaders whom the Egyptians called “Sea Peoples” in 1179 BC. The reliefs of the event apparently show only a selective representation of the naval battle, with just nine total ships, plus a land battle.

Evidently, the Egyptians knew about the advancing forces that had made their way from the Aegean Sea all the way around the eastern Mediterranean. The Egyptians prepared a trap, perhaps in the mouth of the Nile. The relief, if accurate, portrays major elements of the battle. Massed archers rained arrows from shore, while the Egyptian marine troops attacked with composite bows, javelins, swords, rods, and slings (Figs. 3.10, 4.10). Their long-range weapons would have outdistanced the enemy javelins and swords. The enemy boats are shown without oars, limiting their maneuverability and placing them at a severe disadvantage. The relief shows Egyptian marines hauling live enemy warriors from the water or capturing them when they reached shore so they could be used as slaves.

The corresponding land battle shows Egyptian infantry and chariotry attacking the Sea Peoples’ infantry, chariotry and baggage train (see Fig. 4.11, Fig. 5.11). The Egyptian troops outnumber the invaders in the relief, and seem to have caught them by surprise. The native Egyptian and mercenary Sherden (who would have been related to the invaders!) appear to kill the enemy soldiers and civilians with ease.



Fig. 4.10 – Naval battle against invading Sea Peoples
Egyptian warship in center; Sea Peoples' ship on right

Although Egyptian records often mention other battles during this period, they do not give enough detail to determine the strategy used by either side. One does find elements of surprise, ambush, ruse, bribery, and extortion, as well as warfare against nomads, elephants, and confederations of foes. The records of Merenptah and Ramesses III fighting against Libyan attackers from 1208–1176 BC usually give the casualty figures for the Libyans, but not the numbers, composition, or arrangement of the Egyptian troops, or the events of the battles.

Other Battles

In addition to the above-described battles in the open field, the Egyptians often attacked walled cities. When faced with such an attack, the cities' inhabitants had to choose to surrender or hold out and pray that their fortifications could withstand the attack. Egyptian reliefs sometimes depict such an assault on a fortified city, often shown elevated on a hill (as in Fig. 4.11) and surrounded by moats. In a typical attack on a fortified city, Egyptian archers provided heavy cover fire while assault troops protected by shields slung over their backs attacked the city gates with axes or climbed scaling ladders (all shown in Fig. 4.11).

Attacks on Cities

Egyptian attackers who reached the top of enemy walls would begin to slay defenders. One picture (not reproduced in this book) shows an Egyptian sounding his trumpet from the top of the wall, perhaps to signal the final charge or else to announce victory. Surprisingly, the

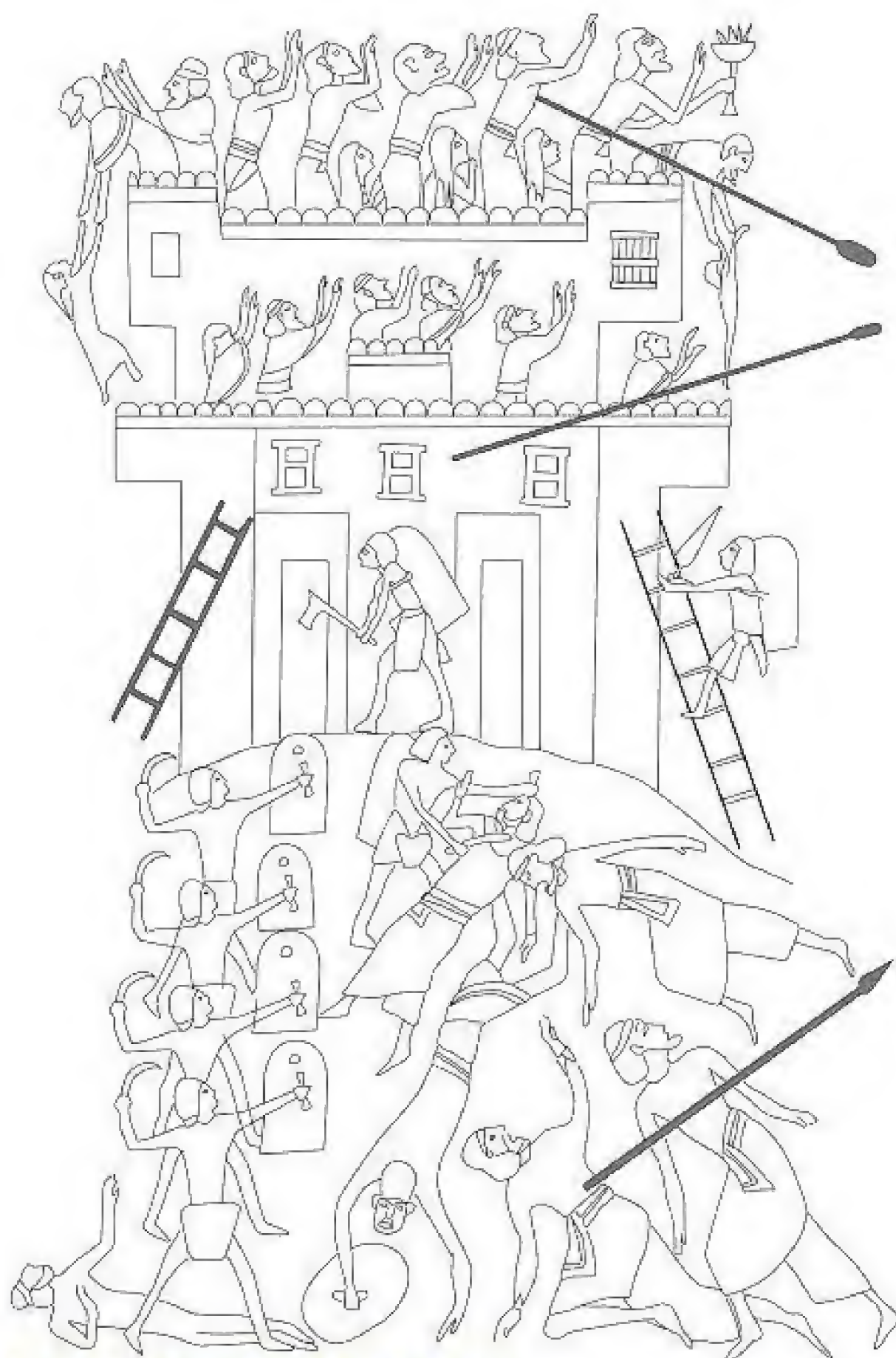


Fig. 4.11 – Attack on fortified city

Troops of Ramesses II at Ashkelon in southern Canaan, 13th century BC

Soldiers who made captures or kills would present the person(s) or specified body part(s) to the pharaoh, who would commend the soldier and present him with rewards. Severed hands most often served as proof of enemy killed (Fig. 4.12). One text even proclaims, “How pleasant it is when you go to Thebes and your chariot is weighed down with hands.”³⁹ After their battles with the Libyans in the late 13th century, the Egyptians used the phalli of the uncircumcised Libyans instead of hands.⁴⁰ Compare in the Bible Saul’s request to David for “foreskins” (perhaps a euphemism for phalli) from slain Philistines in 1 Sam 18:25–27 or the mention of apparently severed hands in Judg. 8:6, 15. For their kills, Egyptian soldiers often received as rewards items made of gold (the “Gold of Valor”) like jewelry, golden lions, or golden flies used as decorations of honor.⁴¹ If he captured prisoners, the successful soldier might get to keep those prisoners as his own slaves.

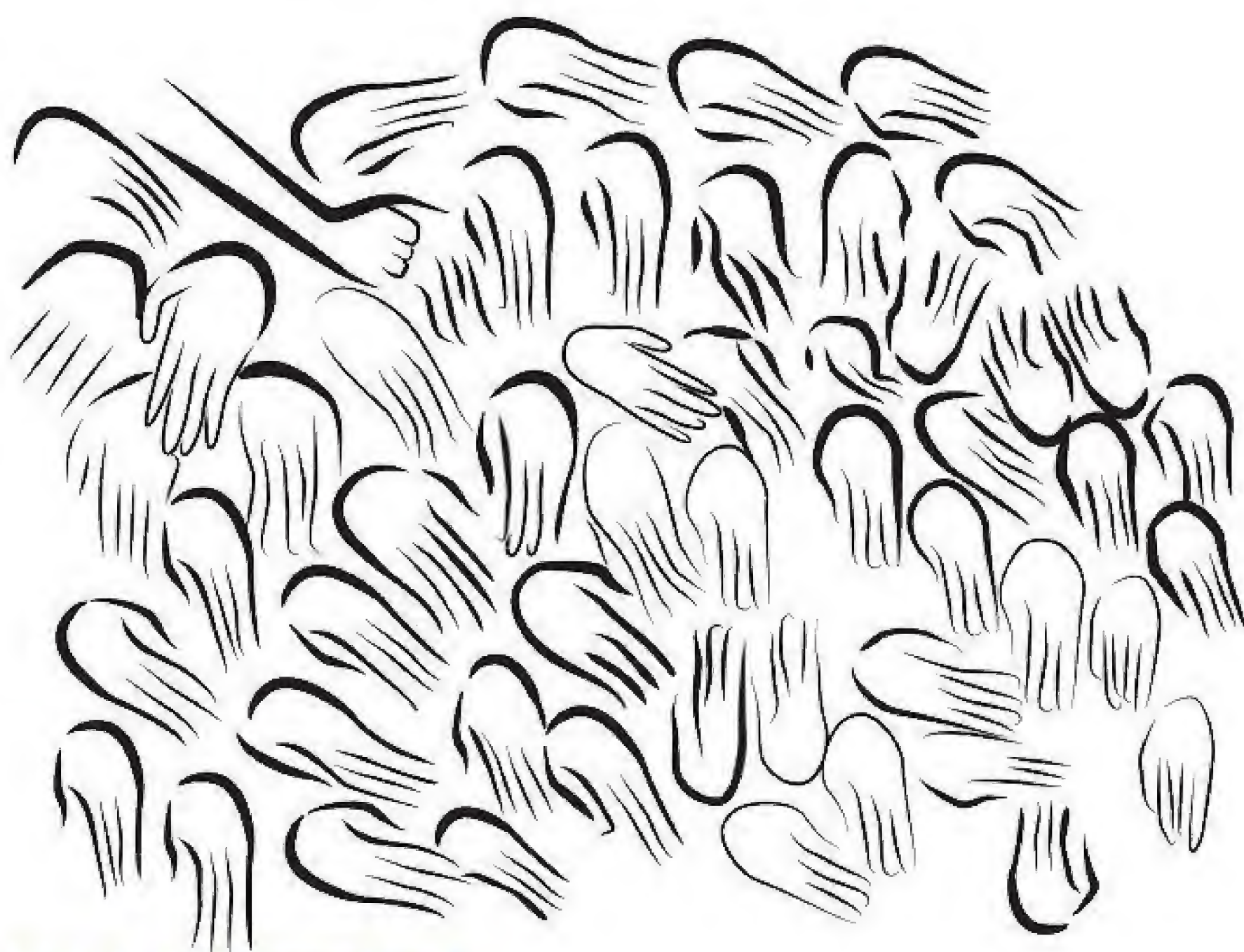


Fig. 4.12 – Pile of severed hands

From enemy troops at time of Ramesses III

Oftentimes the pharaohs kept the plunder and prisoners as property of the crown. Such prisoners kept as slaves represented a significant source of labor for Egypt. Some were incorporated into the military, while others were settled in strongholds as farmers and taxed in clothing and grain. Many served as laborers in the temple complexes and the immense land holdings associated with them. By the time of Ramesses III, a listing of all temple property accounted for approximately two percent of the population, fifteen percent of all arable land, 160 towns, 90 ships, and nearly 500,000 animals, much of it coming from or made possible by war plunder.⁴²

Captured sons of foreign rulers and officials often received special treatment. Like other nations of the time (cf. Dan. 1:3–7), the Egyptians often took foreign princes back to Egypt to educate them there and make these future leaders and officials more favorably disposed to Egypt. If such a captive was the son of a foreign ruler who died, the pharaoh could then send the son to replace the dead ruler and hopefully foster better relations between Egypt and that subject state.⁴³

Not all enemy officials received such favorable treatment. The pharaohs often killed the leaders of rebellions in ceremonies and displayed their bodies as trophies of war (cf. Josh. 10:16–27). Pharaoh Ahmose in the 16th century hung a Nubian prince head downward at the bow of his royal barge as he returned from war. In the 15th century, Amenhotep II defeated and brought back seven Nubian princes hanging upside down on the prow of his barge while they were still alive. He then slew them himself with his mace in the temple of Amon and hung six of the bodies on the city wall of Thebes. He had the seventh hung on the walls of Napata upriver in Nubia as a warning to the Nubians. Later pharaohs such as Seti I, Ramesses II, and Ramesses III also slew kings in the temple as part of religious ceremonies demonstrating that power for victory came from Amon.⁴⁴

*Other
Events after
the Battle*

The pharaohs also celebrated their victories by throwing great feasts and making records of their exploits in various temples. Together with their army, they celebrated by displaying plunder, making gifts to the gods, and giving elaborate “Feasts of Victory” with a variety of exotic foods. The campaign officially ended when the public records of the campaign were then inscribed on the walls of the temples. For example, Ramesses II had the record of his exploits at Kadesh engraved in temples at Abydos, Luxor, Karnak, Abu Simbel, and the Ramesseum, undoubtedly to proclaim his own glory as well as that of his god.

During campaigns, scribes kept daily records on leather scrolls. These listed matters such as descriptions and details of strategic operations as well as individual sorties and names of commanders. These scrolls were then deposited in the temple of Amon after the campaign; they provided information for the general summaries that were chiseled onto monumental inscriptions in the temples or on stele.⁴⁵

Once the campaign was over and the enemy defeated, conditions in Egypt reverted to those of peacetime. A text following Merenptah's defeat of Libyan invaders describes these changes as follows: the strongholds were left to themselves; the wells were reopened; messengers walked in the shade of city walls and waited for watchmen to wake up (in contrast to the urgency of wartime); soldiers slept; border scouts patrolled as they desired; and sentinels no longer cried warnings that foreign envoys were arriving.⁴⁶ Egypt's gods, pharaoh, and army had done their jobs, making Egypt prosperous and secure once again. Life was as it should be.

NOTES

¹ Donald B. Redford and James M. Weinstein, "Hyksos," *ABD* 3:341–48.

² Pritchard, *ANET*, 248 n. 59.

³ Though the straight sword worked well for hand-to-hand fighting with small shields, the reliefs suggest that the Egyptians did not use the straight sword as much as the sickle-sword. By contrast, the Libyans who attacked Egypt ca. 1200 BC and lost 9,111 swords (Breasted, *ARE* 3:588–89) are shown using straight swords (see Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 BC* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), pl. 10).

⁴ For description (in German) of rod, see Wolf, *Bewaffnung*, 79; for use by Sherden, see Yadin *AWBL* 2:249, and illustration on 2:336–37.

⁵ For further discussion, see McDermott, *Warfare*, 82–83.

⁶ Ibid., 53–64, 150–57; Wallace E. McLeod, "An Unpublished Egyptian Composite Bow in the Brooklyn Museum," *American Journal of Archaeology* 62 (1958): 397.

⁷ Evidence from antiquity suggests that archers could shoot composite bows quite accurately up to sixty yards, with an effective range of at least 175 but less than 380 yards. See McLeod, “The Range of the Ancient Bow,” *Phoenix* 19:1 (Spring, 1965): 8.

⁸ Wolf, *Bewaffnung*, 83–85; McLeod, “An Unpublished Egyptian Composite Bow,” 399–400. Gad Rausing (*The Bow: Some Notes on Its Origin and Development* (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerups, 1967), 77) argues that materials like birchbark and birchwood used in making composite bows suggest that all were imported. See also Rodriguez, *Arsenal*, 207–15, 232–34 for helpful discussion and imagery of Egyptian bows and arrows.

⁹ The sling depicted survived with only the pouch and the cord with the looped end (Bonnet *Waffen*, Fig. 52). The second cord was added to the image for clarity. Two other Egyptian slings were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. These were woven from linen, and were quite possibly of higher quality than the typical sling, which may have been made from leather. See Rodriguez, *Arsenal*, 244–45, for image and description.

¹⁰ The rather scanty evidence about the sling’s range shows that its effective range exceeded 200 yards, compared to 175+ yards for the bow. See McLeod, “Range,” 14.

¹¹ McDermott, *Warfare*, 138–42.

¹² See E. Stephen Gurdjian, M.D., “The Treatment of Penetrating Wounds of the Brain Sustained in Warfare: A Historical Review,” *Journal of Neurosurgery* 39 (Feb. 1974): 157–67. Also see Gabriel and Metz, *Sumer to Rome*, 47–79 for information on the force soldiers could produce using different weapons and the ability of helmets and other defensive equipment to protect those who wore them.

¹³ The lack of clarity in the texts and the challenge of interpreting the reliefs contribute to this confusion. The reliefs are particularly hard to interpret given the possible loss of information because of detail that may have been originally portrayed in paint, now lost. For example, the reliefs clearly show some kind of garment on the upper torso of some of the chariot-warriors of Figs. 3.1 and 3.2 and the marines in 3.10, but the type of protection is unclear. The artists may be portraying simple linen or leather garments, or they may have chiseled into the stone the outline of the garment and used paint to portray scales or strips of metal. Some assume the absence of clear evidence means that

even chariot-warriors like Nakt-her-Peri and his driver were probably bare-chested, or used only a linen or leather garment and a shield for protection in battle. Given the outline of the garment shown on the upper torso of Egyptian charioteers and the numerous coats of mail captured from the Canaanites at Megiddo, this book assumes that charioteers like Nakt-her-Peri may well have been mail-clad. If the Canaanite army could supply at least 200 coats of mail for their warriors, chances are that the Egyptians could have done at least that much for their charioteers. Note also discussion in Yadin, *AWBL* 1:85.

¹⁴ See drawings in Yadin, *AWBL* 2:251–52, and restored coloring on 2:340–41. Yadin (1:85) notes that scale armor could have large or small metal scales, ranging from ca. 400 to more than 1000 scales in a coat of mail. The higher the number, the better the quality. Hoffmeier (“Annals,” p. 12, n. 64) notes that the Egyptian word “tunic” is written with a determinative for a leather hide, suggesting that the metal plates were sewn on leather garments.

¹⁵ For detailed descriptions and drawings of the six chariots found in the tomb of Tutankhamun and comparison with other extant chariots, see Littauer and Crouwel, *Chariots and Related Equipment*, esp. pp. 53–104. They note that the construction of these chariots “required great precision of workmanship. (T) his technique produced some of the finest examples of the wheelwright’s and carriage maker’s craft ever known.” They also point out that “such a construction, using glue and rawhide, would be completely impractical in a damp climate” (p. 94).

¹⁶ The wheels’ spokes were formed from six pieces of half-round wood, each bent at a 60° angle and glued to identical half-round adjacent pieces, thus forming six strong, round, connected, composite spokes. To further strengthen these joints, wheelwrights applied wet rawhide that shrank as it dried. They then joined the spokes to wooden tires made from several pieces of bent wood sections, again joined with glue and leather bindings, covered in birch bark (Littauer and Crouwel, *Chariots and Related Equipment*, 76–78).

¹⁷ See also helpful descriptions of chariot maintenance in Yadin *AWBL* 1:89–90.

¹⁸ Pritchard, *ANET*, 234–35.

¹⁹ Breasted, *ARE*, 2:¶ 149.

²⁰ Ibid., 2:¶ 409–10.

²¹ Ibid., 3: ¶ 298; Pritchard, *ANET*, 245. But note Amenhotep's campaign in year nine, which began in November (Pritchard, *ANET*, 246).

²² Breasted, *ARE*, 3: ¶ 570.

²³ Lichtheim, *AEL*, 2:63; Breasted, *ARE*, 4:¶ 70–71. The modern American military still conducts a similar practice. The Marines call it “Pass and Review.”

²⁴ Breasted, *ARE*, 3:¶ 298.

²⁵ Breasted, *The Battle of Kadesh*, 19, n. 76.

²⁶ Schulman, *MRTO*, ¶ 94, 123, 128.

²⁷ Yadin *AWBL* 1:108–09, 236–37; Breasted, *The Battle of Kadesh*, pl. 1.

²⁸ Schulman, *MRTO*, ¶ 149; Breasted, *ARE*, 3:¶ 83.

²⁹ One sarcastic and stressed scribe refers to the inadequate provisions as “peace offerings” (Pritchard, *ANET*, 476). Note the numerous references in the Amarna letters to local rulers in Canaan promising to follow the pharaoh's instructions to prepare provisions for Egyptian troops (Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, EA 55:10–15; 324:10–15 (“I am indeed observing the orders of the king, my lord, the son of the Sun, and I have indeed prepared food, strong drink, oil, grain, oxen, sheep, and goats, before the arrival of the troops of the king, my lord. I have stored everything for the troops of the king, my lord.”); 325:15–19; etc.).

³⁰ Pritchard, *ANET*, 235. See also Schulman, “Military Organization in Pharaonic Egypt,” 291; Yadin *AWBL* 1:110.

³¹ Pritchard, *ANET*, 246.

³² Note how military history has repeated itself more recently with the key roles played by tanks, planes, and aircraft carriers.

³³ Lichtheim, *AEL*, 2:57–58; Breasted, *ARE*, 3:¶ 300–3, with diagrams.

³⁴ For general information on attacks, see Yadin *AWBL* 1:228–29; 2:346–47; for discussion of battering rams, see 1:96–97 and illustrations on 1:17, 229.

³⁵ See Breasted, *ARE*, 2:¶ 4 for descriptions of one siege lasting six years and another lasting “many years.” Cf. 2:¶ 616.

³⁶ Pritchard, *ANET*, 22–23.

³⁷ Breasted, *ARE*, 2:¶ 783; Pritchard, *ANET*, 247.

³⁸ Pritchard, *ANET*, 234–38, 245–46, etc.

³⁹ Nelson, *Medinet Habu Reports I*, 24.

⁴⁰ Breasted, *ARE*, 3:¶ 587 notes that the Egyptians used the typical severed hands for proof that a soldier had killed one of the Libyans’ allies, but they required severed phalli for the uncircumcised Libyans. Perhaps this is due to the similarity in skin color between the circumcised Egyptians and the uncircumcised Libyans. More likely, the Libyans differed from the other peoples by not circumcising their males, so the Egyptians used the phalli as indisputable proof of a dead Libyan. One can imagine that an enemy might allow their Egyptian captor to remove their hand in a trade for their life, but not their phallus. Schulman, *MRT0*, ¶ 42 also records quantities of up to 250 heads in a list of plunder.

⁴¹ In Breasted, *ARE*, 2:¶ 21–24, one soldier boasts of receiving forty different items of gold from three different pharaohs. See also the long list of rewards won by the infantryman Amenemheb in Schulman, *MRT0*, ¶ 24.

⁴² Note, for example, the command to take the people of Joppa “as plunder, so that (the pharaoh) may fill the House of (his) father, Amon-Re, King of the Gods, with male and female slaves” (Pritchard, *ANET*, 23). See also *ANET*, 248, 260–62; Breasted, *ARE*, 4:¶ 151–412.

⁴³ Pritchard, *ANET*, 239, 247; Breasted, *ARE*, 2:¶ 463.

⁴⁴ Breasted, *ARE*, 2:¶ 780, 797; 3:¶ 113; 4:¶ 137.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2:¶ 541–73; 3:¶ 104–06, 348; Hoffmeier, “Annals of Thutmose III”, 7–8.

⁴⁶ Breasted, *ARE*, 3:¶ 616.

PHILISTIA:

ISRAEL'S NEIGHBOR AND ENEMY

EAT OR BE EATEN: THE PHILISTINES KILL KING SAUL

“Eat or be eaten.” Dagarat¹ the Philistine warrior muttered the words aloud as he tossed aside the last bone from the wild dog that he and the other soldiers in his unit had just finished eating. Like most Philistines, Dagarat liked eating dogs occasionally,² but he figured he savored them more than most. Dagarat also enjoyed observing dogs, and he appreciated their toughness and hunting instincts. They had to be tough to keep on the right side of the eat-or-be-eaten equation. Only the best stayed alive, and Dagarat admired that. He appreciated the way they tasted even more.

Eat or be eaten. It was the way of the dog. Whether working individually or in packs, stronger dogs killed and ate the weaker prey, including other dogs. Dagarat had witnessed the process play out again that day among the dogs that were following the army. He had often seen dogs moving along with the Philistine army, knowing that the soldiers would eventually provide them with a feast. Regardless of who won the battle, the dogs always enjoyed a good meal afterward (cf. 1 Kings 21:24; Jer. 15:3; 1 Sam. 17:44, 46). So they followed along, killing as needed while they waited for the big event. On this day, Dagarat had taken advantage of their preoccupation with their own hunt to get close enough to kill the biggest and strongest dog with his spear. Dogs were good hunters, but Dagarat was better. Sometimes even the best could get eaten.

Dagarat ran out of time for thoughtful reflection; it was time to finish setting up camp for the night. He knew the routine well from



Fig. 5.1 – Head of Philistine warrior
from Egyptian relief

the dozens of military expeditions he had participated in over the last fifteen years. He was now an old man of thirty-five,³ but he still had the strength to fight for his people and did his part proudly. He was getting old, however, and wondered if this would have to be his last campaign. He could tell he wasn't as quick as he had been—not a good thing in battle. He also grew tired more quickly and took longer to recover. Fortunately he wouldn't have to stand guard tonight, so he could get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow would be another long day of marching, probably the last before reaching the place of battle. Dagarat had long ago mastered the skill of shutting off his mind and resting,⁴ and soon he fell fast asleep, renewing his energy for the next day's march.

The following morning the troops awoke early, broke camp, and resumed their march northward toward the Great Valley and the anticipated place of battle. Dagarat lived in the city of Ashdod near the coast, one of the five great Philistine cities. When the call came to assemble for war, the troops had gathered in each of those cities, marched the few miles north to the rendezvous point at Aphek (Map 5.1), and then continued north along the Great Coastal Road. He had often marched on this strategic route, as had many other armies before him. The Philistine forces were heading toward the Great Valley (which the Israelites called the Jezreel Valley) in north-central Canaan, hoping to draw King Saul and his weak Israelite army out of the hills into the open, where the stronger Philistine forces could destroy them. Dagarat and his fellow heavy infantrymen would probably play an important role in the battle, and he had plenty of time to ponder that and other thoughts as he marched through the day.

Once again, the refrain *eat or be eaten* filled his mind. It was the way of dogs; it was also the way of men. People had to help others, at least to some degree. But not all could thrive or even survive, so men also had to, in a sense, eat or be eaten. Men were stronger and smarter than animals, so men ate animals. Philistines were stronger and smarter than other men. They didn't eat other men, but they did kill others to take their land and possessions. Some may have thought this unjust, but Dagarat and his fellow Philistines simply used their strength to take what



Map 5.1 – Philistine & Israelite approaches to Saul's final battle

they needed, whether that meant land or crops or goods. *Eat or be eaten*. The tough and strong usually did the eating, and the Philistines fit that description. They got to eat, and the others' things got eaten; that's just the way the world worked.

Dagarat was also thoughtful enough to realize that occasionally the weaker ended up eating the stronger—not often, but sometimes. He had observed weaker dogs gang up on a stronger dog and eat it. He had also seen weaker people occasionally overcome the stronger to kill them and take their things. Sometimes the weak used an advantage in tactics or terrain to kill the strong, and at times it seemed that the weak won without a clear human reason.

Did the gods will the weak to occasionally eat the strong? Perhaps. Perhaps that was the only way to explain victories by the weak. Dagarat considered himself as religious as most Philistines. They worshipped the gods Dagon, Ashtoreth, and Baal-zebub,⁵ but Dagarat preferred Dagon because of his temple in Dagarat's city of Ashdod (1 Sam. 5:1–5). In all honesty, Dagarat wasn't always sure whether the Philistines flourished because their gods were stronger than other gods or because the Philistines themselves were stronger and better warriors.

Maybe both. Who knew? The gods could be fickle, as demonstrated by the way events in life and the fortunes of one's people sometimes played out in history.

Some of Dagarat's earliest memories came from historical tales that his grandfather passed on about the Great Migration. In the time of Dagarat's grandfather's grandfather, the Philistines and their cousins among the Sea Peoples—the Tjekker, Sheklesh, Denyen, and Weshesh—had been forced to leave their ancient homeland across the Great Sea.⁶ Their combined peoples made the Great Migration around the eastern end of the Great Sea all the way to Egypt (Map 5.2), defeating all who resisted during their search for a new home. They had eventually tried to conquer the fat, green land of Egypt in one final battle, but they lost to the weaker Egyptians. The stories said that the Philistines and their fellow Sea Peoples had been stronger, but the Egyptians had learned of the approaching conquerors and prepared their naval and land forces well (see “Battle Tactics” in chap. 4). The Egyptians caught the invaders off guard and overwhelmed them. Many died, and many more were captured. Had the two sides fought on equal footing, the invaders would certainly have won. But the weaker



Map 5.2 – Migration of the Sea Peoples
(place of origin uncertain)

the chariots were of little value. But out on open ground, the horse-drawn vehicles offered a tremendous advantage, and the Philistines were headed toward the Great Valley with plenty of open terrain. In addition to their advantage with chariots, the Philistine infantry was vastly better armed and trained than the Israelite troops. Only the gods could give Israel victory in this battle. But would they?

Dagarat thought that the presence of the Israelite David at the battle might actually cause the gods to give the victory to Israel. David had defied the odds and defeated Goliath, and David's god seemed to favor him often. David appeared to have a way of becoming stronger while avoiding danger. He had reportedly survived numerous attempts on his life by his own king, Saul (1 Sam. 18-26), and had gathered a private army of 400 men at the same time (1 Sam. 22:1-2).⁷ The man was clearly a capable warrior and an effective leader. The threat from Saul had grown so great that David and his men had agreed to serve

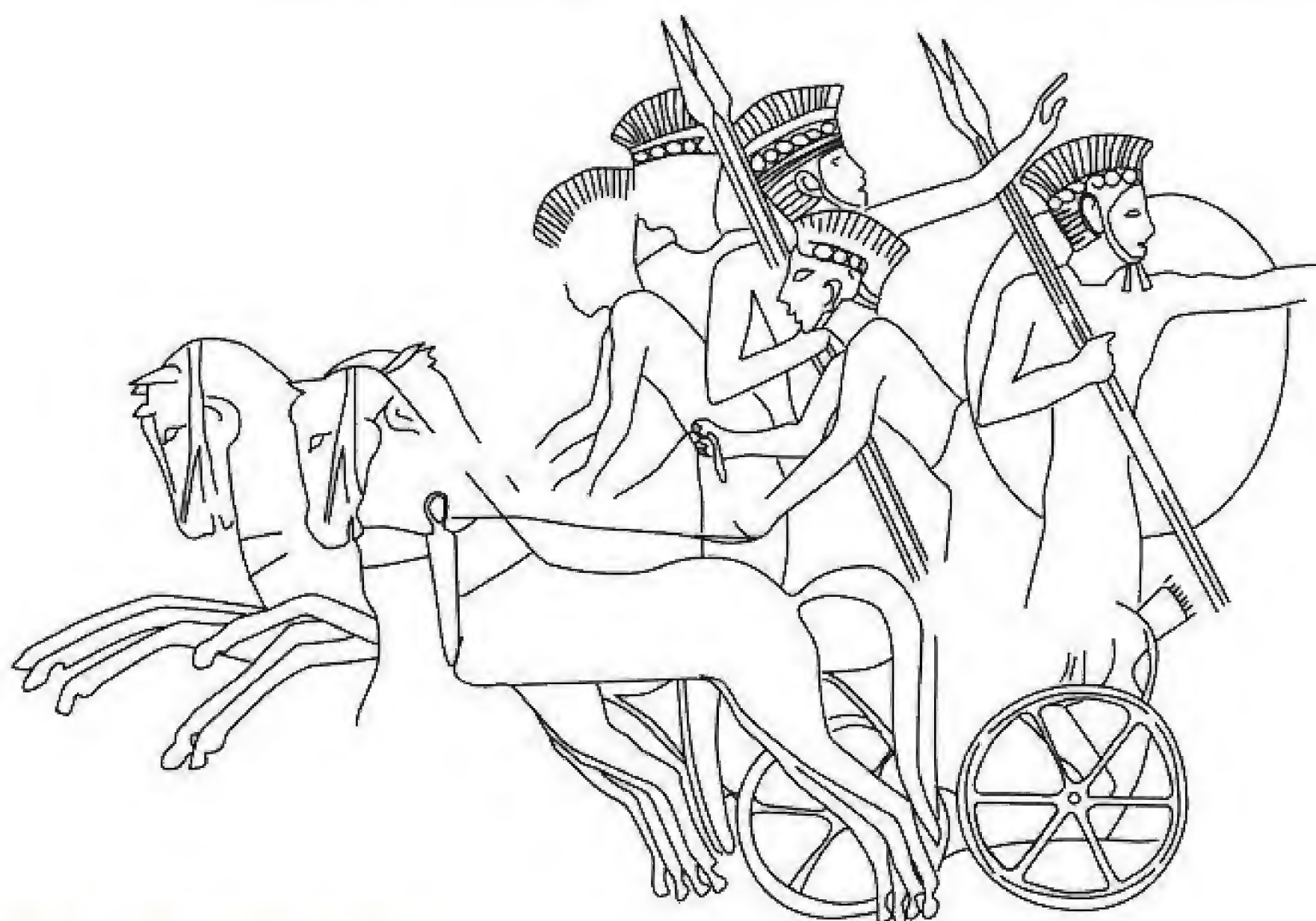


Fig. 5.2 – Philistine chariots

Two chariots from relief of land battle with Egyptians under Ramesses III.

Parts of image have worn away or are obscured by omitted elements

Achish, the Philistine king at Gath, in exchange for protection from Saul (1 Sam. 27). The Philistines had been glad to take advantage of the strife between David and his king to further weaken Saul and Israel. For their service to Achish, David and his men received their own little town, Ziklag, south of Gath on the edge of the desert (Map 5.1)—not much of a prize in Dagarat's opinion. In exchange for the town and sanctuary in Philistine territory, David and his private army had promised to serve and protect their Philistine overlord. Apparently they had kept their promise, and David had reportedly even carried out raids against his own people (1 Sam. 27:8–12).⁸

Now that the Philistines were going to battle against the Israelites, David found himself obligated to fight with his overlord against his own people (1 Sam. 28:1–2). Dagarat thought this an interesting and troubling prospect. Would David actually fight against his own king and his nation's army? Dagarat had his doubts, as did a number of other Philistine warriors and officers. David and his men had started out toward the battlefield with the troops from Gath, but they went no farther than the Philistine rendezvous at Aphek. In the war council there, the other Philistine kings had convinced Achish to send David and his army back home (1 Sam 29). The Philistines gave up a fine leader and hundreds of proven troops, but they avoided a potential rebellion and perhaps lessened the chances of the gods working in Israel's favor.⁹

The Philistines had left their concerns for David behind them at Aphek, and now turned to face Saul and his army, weak as it was. The Philistines had chosen to push all the way to the Great Valley to try to force Saul out into the open. Although the Philistines had often defeated the weaker Israelites, so far they had been frustrated in their attempts to deliver the deathblow. Saul had wisely kept to the hills in the earlier engagements, taking advantage of the familiar, rougher terrain while neutralizing much of the Philistine military advantage.

The Philistines had now settled on the bold strategy of establishing themselves in the Great Valley. Taking the Valley would not only give them excellent farmland, it would also further weaken Israel by separating the majority of Israelites in the central hill country from their countrymen who lived in the hills of Galilee farther north. However, the Valley was a long way from the Philistine heartland, and they risked overextending themselves. They hoped to force Saul and his meager militia out of the hills to defend their holdings in the

Only when the Israelites got well out into the narrow valley would the Philistines move. On a signal from the Philistine commander, the chariots would advance and make a few passes in front of the enemy, firing several rounds with their bows. They were to look like they were attacking but do minimal damage, allowing the enemy to continue advancing. Then the Philistine commander would give a signal, and the chariots would head back toward their wings. By the time they returned, hopefully the Israelites would be about halfway across the Valley. Then the commander would signal again for the Philistine archers and slingers to begin firing and the infantry to charge, engaging and capturing the attention of the Israelites. Once the Israelites were occupied, the commander would signal yet again. The chariots would head back out, but this time, they would circle around the troops from both armies without engaging so they could get to the Israelite rear before attacking. If all went well, the Philistines would surround the Israelites and cut them to shreds. Dagarat thought the plan fit the situation well and had a reasonable chance of working, but as he knew from repeated experience, battles rarely went according to plan.

Surprisingly, this battle did. Although the Philistines knew that it could take many days or even weeks before the Israelites engaged (cf. 1 Sam. 17, esp. v. 16), they had to wait just a few days. Shortly after the Philistines drew up into battle formation one morning and the chariots made their initial sweeps, the charioteers signaled that they had spotted the enemy at the base of Mt. Gilboa. The horse-drawn vehicles returned as planned, and the Israelite forces emerged from the forested high ground as if on cue. The two armies had a clear view of one another. Dagarat scoffed at the enemy's small number and obvious lack of equipment and training, but he had to commend them for their bravery. The Israelites could see they were badly outmatched, but they continued their advance anyway. Were they brave or just stupid? Dagarat figured it was both, and thought that if the gods had not determined to help Israel, the enemy would have one fewer king and army by nightfall.

Dagarat was correct. The battle played out exactly according to the Philistine plan. When the Israelites got well into the valley, the Philistine commander signaled and the charioteers advanced to put down light fire with their bows. The commander signaled again, the horses returned, and the Philistines fired and charged. Their chariots then looped around as planned, enveloping the Israelites. Saul and his outmatched army

fought bravely but in vain. The Philistines slowly but gradually cut them down until less than half their number remained.

Eventually Saul signaled for a retreat, and a part of his force broke through and began to flee back toward Mt. Gilboa and the safety of the hills. Those Israelites thought the move would save their lives, but as soon as they separated from the main Philistine force, the Philistine archers could begin firing again. The archers had stayed just behind their own lines with little to do for most of the battle. With the two sides so close together, they had to refrain from shooting lest they hit their own men. Now they could fire in earnest once more, and had the unprotected backs of the fleeing Israelites for targets. Many fell with the first volley, and the archers continued their deadly work (1 Sam. 31:3; 1 Chron. 10:3). Those who survived continued fleeing to and then up the lower slopes of Mt. Gilboa, out of the range of the archers. The Philistine chariots then took over, chasing down and finishing off most of them (2 Sam. 1:6). Dagarat heard several victorious cries from his fellow warriors and wondered if they had just downed Saul or perhaps one or more of his sons. Dagarat was too far away to see, but he knew he would hear before long. Everyone could see clearly that the victory had been overwhelming. Only a few Israelites escaped.

The battle concluded as successfully as it had begun. Nearly all the Israelites lay dead. The Philistines knew they had accomplished their second goal, but they would have to wait until the following day when they combed the battlefield to determine how well they had done with their first. When he finally had the chance to stop and rest, Dagarat noted that Israel's god had not helped his people this day, and the strong had once more eaten the weak.

That evening, after the Philistines had tended to their wounded and taken care to guard the bodies of their dead, they feasted around their fires back at their camp. Dagarat enjoyed the meal of tasty Israelite lamb, courtesy of one of the nearby villages, and he thought about the dogs that were probably feasting as well on the Israelite dead out on the battlefield.

The next morning, the victors enjoyed more of the spoils. They watched the last few Israelite farmers and their families abandoning their properties in the Great Valley, and word soon arrived that more Israelites in the nearby regions across the Jordan River to the east were departing as well. They all knew that Philistine settlers would arrive shortly to take over those lands and homes (1 Sam. 31:7).

The victorious Philistines also combed the battlefield, stripping the dead Israelites of anything of value. They found and collected the corpses of Saul and three of his sons, including Jonathan, the crown prince (1 Sam. 31:2). They gathered around the bodies for a brief celebration of thanksgiving to their gods (cf. Josh. 10:22–27). Then they removed both Saul’s armor and head as trophies of war and sent them back to the Philistine cities in the south with messengers carrying news of the victory. The Philistines also took the bodies of Saul and his sons and fastened them on the walls of Beth Shean, a city at the far eastern end of the Great Valley (Map 5.1). This gruesome display announced to all in the area that the Israelite king and nation had just been decapitated, and that the Philistines now commanded the region.¹²

Dagarat and his countrymen continued to celebrate their great victory over Israel and its royal house as they marched back home, but the thoughtful veteran considered again the Israelite David. The Philistines had probably just imposed on the Israelites their most destructive and humiliating defeat ever, which might even threaten Israel’s very survival. Could the nation continue without a king or capable princes to take his place? And what would David do? David had avoided death numerous times in the past; could he now help his nation avoid complete disintegration? Dagarat didn’t know, and thought he would leave that for the gods to determine. The Philistines’ gods seemed quite capable of defeating the god of Israel, didn’t they? What were the chances that David and his one god could resurrect the Israelite nation to again trouble the mighty Philistines? *Probably very little*, thought Dagarat.

But this time the thoughtful Philistine warrior was wrong. The Bible tells how in the next years David and his God would indeed do that—and more (2 Sam. 5, 8). David and his God would help the weak become strong and turn Israel into the eaters rather than those getting eaten.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND BIBLICAL CONNECTIONS

As the preceding story suggests, the Philistines established themselves along the southern coast of Canaan and dominated the Israelites and other nearby peoples for approximately 150 years before the reign of David. One finds colorful reports of their battles with the Israelites in the

biblical books of Judges and 1 Samuel, as well as in scattered references throughout the Old Testament. Who were these uncircumcised foes of Israel? From where had they come, and what happened to them after they faded from the biblical record?¹³

A number of the earliest biblical references to Philistines appear in the patriarchal stories of Genesis, describing events that perhaps occurred c. 2000 BC. Abraham and his son Isaac have dealings with “Philistines” in “the land of the Philistines” (Gen. 21, 26). Since the great migration of the Philistines and other Sea Peoples didn’t take place until approximately 1200 BC, one might wonder why Philistines appear centuries earlier. Some simply call these early references anachronistic. Others allow that some Philistines or related peoples could have arrived earlier and settled in the same region that was later dominated by those who came in the great wave of immigration. If these earlier immigrants had come from among the Sea Peoples, later readers might naturally have associated them with the Philistines, and the name could have been updated for that audience, a practice found elsewhere in Genesis.¹⁴

Where did the Philistines originate at the outset of the “Great Migration” of Dagarat’s ancestors? Apparently they came from the region of the Aegean Sea, perhaps from Crete or one or more of the other islands between Greece and Asia Minor (Map 5.2). Several of the Philistines’ cultural characteristics such as their pottery and architecture, as well as Goliath’s armor and weaponry (1 Sam. 17:5–7) have close parallels in Aegean culture. A number of textual references also seem to corroborate this connection. Egyptian records describe the Sea Peoples as invaders from islands in the north, and their list of places destroyed during the migration fits well with an origin in the Aegean.¹⁵ Amos 9:7 and Jeremiah 47:4 state that the Philistines came from Caphtor (usually understood as Crete, though some¹⁶ link it to the region of Cilicia in Asia Minor). In addition, Ezekiel 25:15–16 and Zephaniah 2:4–5 use the terms “Philistines” and “Kerethites” (Cretans) as poetic parallels, a pattern which typically denotes synonyms.

Until western scholars began studying Egyptian historical sources in the late 18th and 19th centuries, the biblical material represented nearly all of what the modern world knew about the Philistines. But beginning with Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in AD 1798–1803, French and other scholars began examining reliefs carved into the walls of ancient Egyptian temples and later deciphered the accompanying hieroglyphic texts and other materials. More recently, archaeology has uncovered Philistine

remains from sites known from the Bible (Ashkelon, Ashdod, etc.) as well as some that are not (e.g. Tel Qasile just north of Tel Aviv). These pictures, descriptions, and remains have added a great deal of information to what one reads about the Philistines in the Bible.

The still-incomplete picture that has emerged shows the Philistines as one of a number of related people groups including Denyen, Tjekker, Weshesh, and Sherden, which had migrated to the southeastern Mediterranean, apparently from the area of the Aegean Sea in the region that is today Greece and western Turkey. The Egyptians called these invaders “Sea Peoples” since they came by sea as well as by land. Something, perhaps a cataclysm like a famine or volcanic eruption, apparently forced them to leave their homeland around 1200 BC. They began making their way around the eastern Mediterranean basin, conquering those who lay in their path. They took advantage of the general weakness of the contemporary ancient Near Eastern civilizations, including the formerly great powers of Egypt and the Hittites in Asia Minor. The Sea Peoples attacked Asia Minor, Syria, Canaan, and finally Egypt, contributing to the destruction and general turmoil of the time.

Pharaoh Ramesses III recorded that he repulsed the invaders at the edge of Egypt in naval and land battles in the early 12th century BC and afterward settled them along the southern coast of Canaan. Ramesses’ magnificent reliefs of the two battles give us much of our best information about the Philistines’ appearance and dress, their weaponry and naval forces, and the equipment they utilized for moving on land.

The archaeological record generally supports the Philistines’ Aegean origins. The Philistines would have been Indo-Europeans, and they brought to Canaan a culture reflecting Aegean customs in a number of ways. They did not circumcise their males (Judg. 14:3, etc.), unlike the Semitic peoples such as Israel. When they arrived in Canaan, they apparently wrote in a linear script related to Linear A and B from Crete, although they later adopted the alphabet used in Canaan. Their earlier pottery closely resembles pottery known from Mycenae in Greece (Fig. 5.3), though the Philistine pottery subsequently evolved independently. Their architecture included at least one temple with an open hearth, a feature of buildings back in the Aegean. As noted earlier, even Goliath’s armor and weaponry (1 Sam. 17:5–7) reflect what was worn and used in the Aegean.

About the same time¹⁷ that the Philistines settled along the southern coast of Canaan with their distinct culture, the Israelites were beginning to establish themselves in Canaan, mostly in the hills in the central and northern parts of the country. The emerging Philistines and Israelites battled for land and supremacy, with the Philistines dominating from about the mid-12th to the end of the 11th centuries, the period of the latter biblical judges through the reign of Israel's first king, Saul. The biblical texts clearly reflect the Philistines' superiority—"At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. . . . Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?" (Judg. 14:4; 15:11, ESV). The Philistines enjoyed a great technological advantage in metallurgy and thus weaponry, as reflected by both the biblical texts (1 Sam. 13:16–22) and by the numerous metal tools and furnaces—used for melting ore—uncovered at several Philistine sites.

One sees this Philistine dominance in the biblical texts describing the colorful and famous exploits of the judge Samson, who lived toward

the end of the period of the judges (Judg. 13–16). Samson carried out what appear to be ultimately unsuccessful border skirmishes against Israel's more powerful neighbors to the west. Though Samson won a few battles, his greatest victory cost him his life, and after Samson's death the author of Judges can only say that he "had judged Israel twenty years" (Judg. 16:31, ESV) without establishing peace with the Philistines.

The Bible indicates that Philistine domination continued throughout the ministry of Samuel, Israel's last judge, and the reign of Saul, Israel's first king. Not surprisingly, the archaeological remains from Philistine sites during this time reflect prosperity and expansion. During the life of Samuel, the Philistines won a decisive battle at

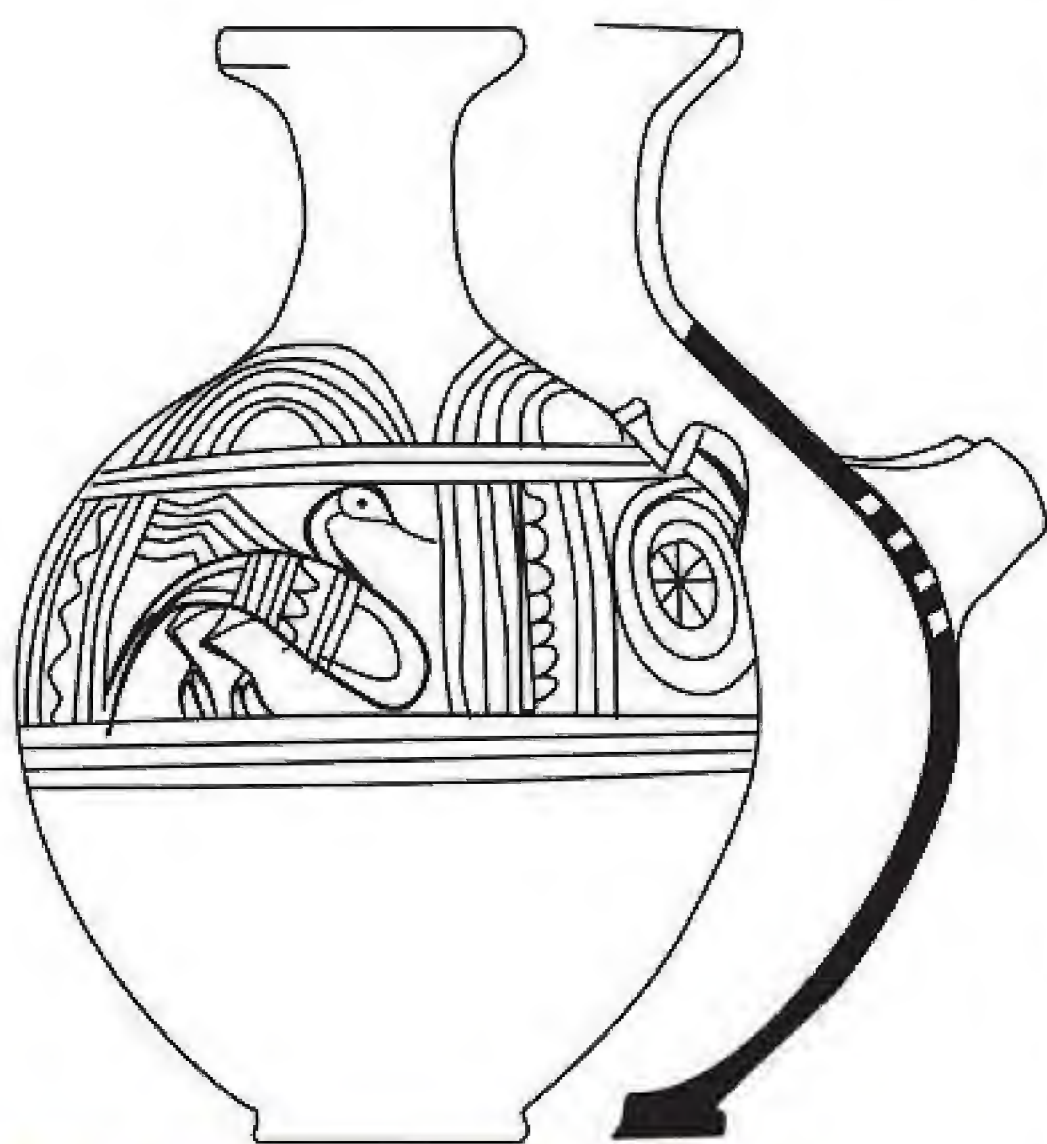


Fig. 5.3 – Philistine “beer strainer” jug

Note perforations inside spout in cross-section on right, apparently for straining grain husks when dispensing beer. Also note typical stylized bird in decoration.

of destruction as they migrated through the eastern Mediterranean, and nearly conquered Egypt before settling along the southern coast of Canaan. They became a military and cultural force that challenged and nearly extinguished the emerging nation of Israel, only to be overcome when David led Israel to a height of power. With this backdrop in mind, we turn to describe the organization, weaponry, and tactics of the Philistine military as best the limited sources from Egypt, the Bible, and archaeology will allow.

MILITARY ORGANIZATION

Like most armies of the time, the Philistines primarily utilized infantry and chariotry in their military. The Bible states that they also had archers, foreign troops, and possibly cavalry. As depicted in the reliefs of the naval battle between Ramesses III and the Sea Peoples, they also had some naval forces. The balance of this chapter will discuss each of these aspects along with other known elements of the Philistine military.

STRUCTURE

One finds surprisingly little information about the structure of the Philistine military in available sources, given the number of times it appears in the biblical texts and Egyptian reliefs. Clearly the Philistine military followed the general contemporary pattern of infantry complemented by chariotry, but most of the biblical references use terms too vague to describe the structures of these branches. The most complete description may be found in 1 Samuel 13:5, ESV—“And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand (number discussed below) chariots, and six thousand horsemen (identity discussed below), and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude.” The Bible clearly names the several branches, but supplies little detail about them. The reliefs offer some supplemental information but also raise matters of interpretation that lessen the reliefs’ potential value.

For example, the effective Philistine military must have utilized an appropriate hierarchy of officers, but we know little about it. The Bible refers to their military leaders with the general term *sārîm* (סָרִים—“commanders” or “officers”—1 Sam. 29:3–4), but how many levels of organization they would have had or what units the officers would have commanded remain unclear. The Bible also uses the term *sērānîm*